THE HIGH ROAD TO HONOR

JULIA SCOTT VROOMAN

Qui
Vincit se Vincit
Ex Libris
Mary Phelps Montgomery

For

Mrs J. B. Montgomery

With many happy

memories of Washington,

and D.A.R. days.

And all manner of good

wishes —

Julia Heath Norman

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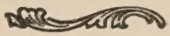

By

JULIA SCOTT VROOMAN

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To
C. V.
—out of all the world!

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THE HIGH ROAD TO HONOR

CHAPTER I

MATHILDE

AS Charleston Bryce's ship turned its prow westward, and the lights along the French coast first became a blur on the horizon and then were lost to view, his four years in the laboratories and clinics of Paris, with all the associations they held for him, seemed to be swallowed up in a vast oblivion. Only the future glowed and beckoned like a shining star.

The moonlight on the water, the surge and swell of the waves, all harmonized with his mood as he gave himself up to the thought of Mathilde. "It was worth while," he confessed, "those four years of hard work, of separation." He had won the right to speak now. He was glad he had not written. Such words as those he had been treasuring in his heart must be spoken face to face. He pictured for the thousandth time the moment when at last they should be alone together; once again he was lost in the thought of her answer, which was to make all things new.

Stretched out on the top deck, Charleston fell into a reverie that brought back vividly visions of Mathilde during that summer at "Faraway," her father's

Adirondack Lodge, when he first waked to the spell of the woman in her, and her radiant spirit began to play its part in the shaping of his life. Quietly, almost imperceptibly, the change she had wrought had stolen upon his consciousness, giving to existence a new and wondrous meaning; there was purpose, plan, achievement, all because of her!

"Others," he said to himself, "could see the superficial change in him, but only Mathilde's eyes could see into the heart of what had happened, what he himself could only partly comprehend. She was the Inspirer, the Interpreter of that deepest self of him, that without her he could neither find nor understand. So intimate and almost mystical, though the scientist would have shuddered at the word, had come to be the communion of his spirit with her spirit, that turning inward toward the highest in himself, he seemed always to be facing her. It was as if his own soul, which was so silent, could speak the verdict only through her voice!

In a slow moving panorama there passed before him from "the beginning" all his golden memories of her. At times he lived over the scenes breathlessly, at times he followed the story almost impersonally, as though it related to some man other than himself. Incidents long forgotten came back to him, real and vivid like the shifting scenery of a dream, while the very words he and Mathilde had spoken repeated themselves in his mind as though some mysterious mental cylinder had caught and registered every syllable.

His last afternoon at "Faraway" they had spent in Mathilde's canoe "The Silver Tongue" and she had said to him "You are off tomorrow and we haven't settled yet about your career."

"Things seem pretty well settled for me," he parried. "'There's not much incentive to go out and sweat for daily bread when Fate in the person of my lamented father has double coated my cake with chocolate. Apparently I'm predestined to be rich."

"That needn't mean that you are predestined to obscurity," Mathilde retorted. "You might make something of yourself in spite of your money."

"There is comfort in your words," Charleston answered mockingly. "Your sympathy will go far toward helping me bear the slings and arrows of my outrageous fortune."

"Let's forget your fortune and think of your future. I have grown such a topping ambition for you this summer," she tapped him affectionately with her paddle, "it would wrench my heart to see you fall short of it. What work would you like best, if you were poor and could afford the luxury?"

"When I was a little chap," he replied seriously, "the old village doctor was the most imposing figure I knew. I used to swell with pride to think that some day I, too, might have a gig and a white horse and dispense pills and powders at will to a whole submissive countryside. To be a great physician or surgeon and fight a winning fight with disease and death—is as thrilling a job as I can imagine. I still think as I did at St. Paul's, that a skeleton is about the most absorbing object in the world."

"When skeletons are clothed with flesh and blood I agree with you. People have been my hobby ever since my discovery, when I was four, that dolls are full of sawdust, and babies are full of life. The day I found that my Paris doll was only a make believe, and that Nancy Weber's baby sister was the real thing,

I was so indignant that Father seriously considered getting a baby for me from the Orphanage. Dear Daddy, it's a wonder anybody can live with me after such a bringing up! Aunt Myra insists I'm a product of the "spoils system."

Then, with engaging irrelevance, as she sprang out of the canoe, "Great surgeons always have great hospitals; if I'm disappointed in love, I'll come and be head nurse at your hospital."

Charleston closed his eyes to see again the picture of her as she darted up the steps toward the camp. . . . Her cheeks were flushed, her garden hat dangled from her shoulders, a mass of scarlet poppies, and her hair rippled and blew about her face in little dancing waves of light, as if it too, like everything about her, were alive and glad.

After she had gone he had stood watching the last rays of the sun as they fell across the lake—the swift deepening and merging of the colors that crimsoned earth and sky and leaped over the waters in a scarlet flame, while all the world of nature thrilled for a breathless moment, as when the pulse of passion beats its triumphant answer to the call of life. Involuntarily he had lifted his hat, baring his brow to the sunset glow. But as he turned toward the camp he was thinking of another light more wondrous than the sunlight, "the light that never was on sea or land," that had risen in his soul.

That night he had lain awake for hours trying to decide whether a confession of his secret would help or hinder matters. The mere thought of Miss Ogden automatically eliminated her as a possible confidant. A semi-invalid for years, she had almost lost the human way of looking at people, being inclined to divide them

up relentlessly as sheep and goats, judging the living in the way, she was fully persuaded in her somewhat straitened soul, that God would judge the dead. Charleston was acutely aware that in her estimation he occupied a prominent place among the goats.

Next Mr. Ogden was mentally weighed in the balance and found wanting. The doughtiest hero of romance might well pause for courage before confessing in that quarter to any dream of winning Mathilde.

As for Mathilde, something made Charleston quite sure there could be no appeal to her just then. Her feeling for himself, deep and strong as he knew it to be, was only a part of that all-encompassing affection which was the atmosphere of her life. It had reached out when he came near and warmed him into life as naturally as the sun's rays reach down and find a million daffodils that are waiting on its coming. Some day the heart of the girl would wake to the magic of a love deeper than any she had dreamed, but there had been no stirring as yet, and it was not for him to force the process of this divine unfolding.

At daybreak he had gone down by the lake to greet the sun again in the splendor of its rising. But as he waited for the dawn, the sky showed cheerless and leaden in token there was to be no sun that day! Shuddering involuntarily as though some evil genius had spoken to him out of the storm-clouds, he had turned away depressed and disconsolate like a man who has come a long journey to a house which in his youth was full of life and gaiety, only to find it empty and forlorn!

* * * * * * *

Charleston's memories kept pace with the slow motion of the boat, as it took its serene way across the water with no sound to break the stillness but the bells that marked the passing of the night, and the answering call from the crow's nest which echoed the deep content of his being, "Eight bells and all's well!"

Had Charleston dreamed in the beginning that almost four years were to separate him from Mathilde, he could not have faced the long-drawn-out torture of it. But a whimsical fate had whisked her about, from one part of the world to another, baffling every effort of his to see her, closing every avenue of approach to her heart.

Often in those slow years, the poet in him had tried to put into a letter what he felt for her, just because it was impossible to keep his love forever a prisoner of his pride, but the critical mind of the scientist sitting in stern judgment on these outpourings had always prevailed against the tumultuous urging of his heart. When the hour finally came to speak, he promised himself he would speak with the "tongue of men and of angels," but he must bide his time!

So the hard won habit of stemming the swift current of his impulses by holding his feelings, even the finest, in check, had led to the throttling of his emotional nature by the brute force of his will, and made this man, instinctively as gentle as St. Francis, do this great violence to his own soul.

Mathilde's letters from America, Italy, Egypt and India, came at rare intervals to bridge the gulf, revealing her as she had been at "Faraway," delicious, unsuspecting, unafraid, full of a tender pride in him that was as serene in its assumption that he belonged to

her, as apparently it was still unconcerned with the possibility that some day she might belong to him.

All that he had possessed of her beside his golden book of memories and his dreams, was a picture in a silver frame of such exquisite workmanship that it might have come from the hand of Cellini himself. Out from the frame looked a young girl, with eyes wide apart and full of wonder, that shone like stars. Close by the frame, a silver bowl was always filled with violets. She had given him the picture at the close of that summer in the Adirondacks, when he was leaving for Johns Hopkins, starting out on his trial voyage in the new waters. In those days when his manhood had seemed so completely at the mercy of uncontrolled impulses, which were the whirlwind he was reaping of the wind his youth had sown, he had been tempted to doubt himself, to despair. But she had never doubted him. On the back of her picture she had written:

> "So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
> So near is God to man,
> When duty whispers low—'thou must'
> The youth replies, 'I can.'"

Yes, he mused, the turning point in his life had been that day when Mathilde had faced him, standing in the garden, and love for her had blown into his heart like the fragrance of a wild rose wafted from the roadside. Consciously or unconsciously, he had been facing toward her ever since. As the prevailing wind on a storm-swept coast bends giant trees to its will, so this love for her had prevailed in his life, bending all his energies in a new way, reshaping all his ideals, creat-

ing for him a new heaven and a new earth whereon she dwelt.

* * * * * * *

Charleston mechanically refilled his pipe, his mind busy now with memories of his life in Paris. . . . It was toward the end of his first year there. He was leaving the class-room after a lecture by Flaubert, head of the Pasteur Institute, perhaps the most celebrated biologist of his time, a little weazened man who had sacrificed most of the normal pleasures of existence to his cold passion for science. Flaubert motioned him to remain, and as soon as the room was empty plunged into talk about Charleston's career, advising him curtly to cut out his clinic work and all side issues and devote himself exclusively to research.

Great as was his reverence for Flaubert, there was in Charleston too much of the romance of the New World, of the impetuous spirit and passion for life at first hand, for him to be satisfied with merely working out theories for others to translate into terms of vital service to humanity. He must needs apply these theories himself, feel the human pulse beat, hearken to the human cry. He tried to explain this to Flaubert. . . .

There were plenty of doctors in the world, the master snapped, to apply the results of knowledge already gained. What was needed was men to go ahead and open up new fields, push back the borders of the unknown. Indicating plainly by his manner that he considered Charleston a fool, and that he had no time to squander on fools, Flaubert abruptly turned away, without giving Charleston a chance to defend himself, and began some microscopic examinations, as though the young man had ceased to exist for him.

* * * * * * *

He was in Flaubert's office a year later, in answer to a peremptory summons. The little man whirled around from his desk and told him, without wasting time on preliminaries, that he had decided to turn Charleston loose in his own laboratory and see how far he could carry out that radio-therapic theory of his. Charleston had spent a lot of time doing work other men could do. Now he was to have *carte blanche,* go ahead and do what other men couldn't do, if he could—or words to that effect.

"You may discover a way to save some of your women and babies in the clinic," he growled.

This was one of the big moments in Charleston's life. Flaubert and he were comrades after that to the end, the older man following his work with the keenest interest, secretly glorying in his growth, taking far more pride in Charleston's career than he had ever shown in his own, while Charleston learned day by day to understand more lovingly and to love with a growing measure of understanding this lonely man whose friendship for himself, like the late flowering of the Century plant, seemed the solitary affection of his life.

* * * * * * *

He was walking across the park one day with Flaubert, trying to persuade the master, whose worn look had worried him of late, to join him for a fortnight in Greece before his return to America. The little man, who never indulged in a holiday, took the matter under advisement and even evinced a certain wistful pleasure in making tentative plans for the journey, but finally insisted that he could not spare

the time, and all Charleston's arguments and entreaties were powerless to move him.

* * * * * * *

One night a month later, Charleston was standing in the door of Flaubert's laboratory, come ostensibly to inquire about the results of some experiments, but really to see if it were not possible he had been mistaken about a look in Flaubert's eyes that had been haunting him with a horrible fear.

Flaubert was bending over his tubes with a feverish intensity, his face partly turned from Charleston, lit with a strange glow. Finally he glanced up, the muscles about his mouth twitching slightly. Setting his instruments down, he came over to Charleston and laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"I must finish this before it is too late," he said, with a wave of his hand at the row of tubes on the bench; "the thing I have been fighting all my life has got me at last, and there is no time to lose."

He spoke simply—then with a note in his voice Charleston had never heard before—"It's not so hard, now that there's somebody else to carry on my work."

Charleston did not answer. There was nothing he could say just then. He took Flaubert's old coat down from its peg and folded him into it, as though he had been a child, and so they went out into the night together.

* * * * * * *

He was standing by Flaubert's bier on which the worn body lay half buried under a mass of garlands and metallic wreaths, tied with ribbons bearing the names of learned societies from all over Europe, and

he was thinking how bravely Flaubert had met his enemy; how when the cancer had made such progress that he knew there was no more hope and no more work for him, he had taken an overdose of chloral, and so "fallen on his long sleep,"—this modern Knight of Science who had gone forth to find the Holy Grail!

How much the master's friendship had meant to him in those years it had run its strange, swift course! How he would miss those evenings spent in Flaubert's monastic-looking quarters, smoking their pipes through long stretches of intimate silence, or discussing some question that was puzzling the scientific world, at times breaking off their talk and crossing over to the laboratory to put their theories to the test, searching far into the night for a solution of some baffling problem that seemed just to elude their grasp.

Looking at the austere floral offerings he thought how typical the man's passing was of his life, full of honors yet empty of affection, pitifully lacking in the human touch. His work had been so remote, so impersonal, that few outside scientific circles had heard of it or even knew his name. If only among all those perfunctory tributes some little child, some woman whose life had been saved by his devotion, had brought a flower out of love and gratitude! Charleston was glad of the impulse to share with his friend something of what was most sacred to himself, which had led him to place a pillow of violets, of Mathilde's violets, under Flaubert's head, that they might breathe out to him at last in death some hint of the divine fragrance and glory of woman that his life had missed.

Instinctively he contrasted with his own high hopes, his full heritage, the bloodless existence of this man,

who in spite of all his discoveries, had never found the way of love . . .

Suddenly a veil lifted . . . Such a thought was treason, he said to himself, treason to the memory of Flaubert. There was no room here for pity; a glory filled the place. Much the master had missed on that lonely way he had taken, but One Thing he had found, beyond all peradventure. *"Greater love hath no man than this"*—the words were sounding in Charleston's ears like a shout of triumph—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life" for his kind!

* * * * * * *

From the past, Charleston's musings took a leap into the future, as he pictured his homecoming. He saw Mathilde in the garden by moonlight, the fragrance of violets in the air. Then he saw himself standing before her in the library, with the firelight on her face, telling her what the thought of her had meant to him all these years, asking now boldly for the reality.

There he always stopped short; just how she would give him her answer, he never could tell. As no one in the world could answer, or had ever answered before; of that he felt quite sure.

CHAPTER II

HOME-COMING

ARRIVED in Cleveland, Charleston got his steamer trunk on to a taxi, bought an enormous box of violets, and was whirled to the hotel where he had decided to put up for the first night. He intended to move over to the Ogden home the next morning for a few days' visit before starting on a business trip to Colorado. But he preferred stopping at the hotel until after that fateful conversation so that he might take his place in the household on the new footing. Later he would stay a full month, or perhaps even six weeks, at "Faraway," he added, shaving himself to the music of this resolve. He certainly deserved some reward, after that interminable pegging away in Paris, and he was going to take it, he promised himself, as he scattered the contents of his suitcase in every direction, looking for a tie of the proper color.

He telephoned the house that he would call in a half hour. He had dined on the car—the butler was to remember that, he cautioned—shuddering at the idea of putting in those first precious moments being forcibly fed by Mathilde's aunt.

As he was going out he noticed the empty silver bowl in front of Mathilde's picture, and a whimsical fancy made him stop a moment, take some violets out of the box he was carrying, and put them in the bowl. He had not the heart that night, just because he was

going to her at last, to neglect the picture that had meant so much to him all those years.

In the elevator, he remembered the letter he had written and forgotten to mail to Johns Hopkins University, declining the proposition to return at once to Europe for some important research work, in case he preferred a post abroad to one at Baltimore. But he had no time to go back for the letter now.

As he sprang into the taxi he was thinking how long it had been since he had taken violets to Mathilde, and it set his pulses beating wildly to realize that now he would always be bringing violets to *her*—not just to her picture!

Mathilde welcomed him rapturously, but in spite of her radiant greeting, he was conscious of an indefinable something in the tone of her voice, the expression of her eyes, which seemed to flash out warnings and challenges, holding him spellbound with a strange fear while she talked.

Mr. Ogden and his sister were there too, to listen to his story which he got through as briefly as possible. "Would they never go," he wondered, "and leave him alone with Mathilde for that answer?" After a few minutes, which seemed interminable, the car was announced to take the older people to the opera. To Charleston's consternation Mr. Ogden proposed staying at home in his honor. Miss Ogden, however, who had ceased to be an invalid, though by still claiming most of the prerogatives of invalidism she generally managed to have her own way, unexpectedly saved the situation by insisting on his going, on the grounds that this was the last night of opera, and only the first, she hoped, of many evenings with Charleston. Of course, she added, as she motioned the maid to

put on her wrap, he would bring over his luggage in the morning and make the house his headquarters.

Charleston helped Mr. Ogden on with his coat, shut the two safely in the car, and leaped back into the house, a strange exhilaration in all his being. At last his hour, the hour he had been working and waiting for all these years, had come. Mathilde motioned him to a seat beside her. "Sit down and let's talk," she commanded, "I'm sure our own experiences are a thousand times more thrilling than Faust's."

The old light was in her eyes, and Charleston looked up like a drowning man who sees the shore at last. "Besides," she continued, her face aglow, "something wonderful has happened. I must tell you quickly and get your blessing. I didn't write you because things have been in a turmoil, a regular domestic earthquake, with everybody shaken to his or her foundations at the idea of my wanting to marry the man I love," she went on, too absorbed in her story to note the effect of her words on Charleston, "but the house of my will is built on a rock, so the waves have beat against it in vain. First it was on account of his ideas that the family objected; then they insisted that his age would wreck my happiness; he is fifteen years older than I am."

She paused just long enough for Charleston to inquire his name.

"Oh, I forgot," she laughed, "The Honorable David Brandon, who is leading the fight in the legislature against crooked business and crooked politics of all the fifty-seven varieties. When you see the colors some of the newspapers paint him, you won't be surprised that the family was aghast at the idea of my marrying him. For about four years, ever since he began his fight

for what he calls constructive conservatism, he and his ideas have been systematically denounced as radical and dangerous. There is actually a feeling in certain circles—and the miserable part of it is they are *our* circles,—that he is a menace to the community. So the men whose divine right to pick the peoples' pockets David has been challenging, are lined up against him in almost a solid phalanx, backed by everybody they can hoodwink or bully. You know," she announced irrelevantly, "all that money that came to us from Uncle Jasper's railroad smells to high heaven."

She hesitated an instant, her hands clasped in front of her, trying to decide after this digression, which among the happenings that clamored to be told, would prove the shortest cut back to Brandon. Suddenly she made up her mind. She would choose at random, shut her eyes and follow any path. All roads for her led safely back to him.

"David says when the American people wake up, the railroad problem will be one of the first they will insist on solving. And you may depend on it," she predicted with shining eyes, "the harder the fight, the surer David is to be in the thick of it. Politics is very fascinating," she ended with naïve gravity.

The close contact with the poor, and the insight into their condition which his clinic work had given Charleston, together with his persistent instinct to go to the bottom of things, had brought him face to face with some of the most baffling sociological and economic problems of the day. There were ills in the body politic, he had discovered, as terrible as any physical ills—running sores of poverty, ghastly wounds that civilization had inflicted on itself. If scientific men the world over were devoting themselves to the gigantic

task of finding a cure for the physical ills of the race, why should not statesmen, with equal enthusiasm and devotion, set about finding cures for economic and political ills? The question often had presented itself to Charleston's mind as an entirely obvious one. He knew little of practical politics, of the flaming swords that spring up in the path of men who dare to do battle with organized greed. If he had learned of Brandon's work and devotion at another time, and from another person, he would have thrilled to the story, but for Mathilde to be telling him all this, when he had come for her Answer! His brain was numb, his mind made no response to her words, except a stupid sort of wonder that any human being, least of all a woman like Mathilde, could be so absorbed in the subject of politics. But he did not obtrude his thoughts into the conversation, and she went on contentedly.

"David is a wonderful speaker. So my ambition is to be satisfied, and we are to have another silver tongue like Grandfather's in the family. Do you remember the 'Silver Tongue' on Lake Placid?" she demanded idly, "and the jolly times we used to have in it?"

Did he remember! It was a relief to Charleston that the running fire of her talk had wiped out all necessity for response and reduced him to the rôle of listener. Strangely enough it was almost a relief to realize how completely he was forgotten.

"He's coming down to-morrow for the week-end; so you can see him for yourself. And only think," she added softly, shielding her face with her hand, as though the fire were responsible for the sudden flush on her cheek, "he's going to bring the engage-

ment ring, to ratify the family's reluctant consent. We've agreed to postpone the wedding for at least two years," she went on blithely, for love had made her blind and she could not see the look on Charleston's face; "I promised Daddy to take that trip to Japan with him he has had his heart set on, but it will be a bleak black ocean that rolls between David and me!"

She was looking straight ahead of her, watching the fantastic play of the firelight, and her voice had a dreamy sound, as though it had followed her heart afar off where Brandon was.

"You know—it's too amusing;—I had just about made up my mind never to marry, when David came along. I've met plenty of men who could give me everything earth has to offer, but I want so much more than just that! All my life I have been fed on the fleshpots of Egypt, and gone hungry. I have had nothing to feed the roots of me, to make me grow. It's a stifling sensation to feel one's growth stopped; not to know how to go on, to have everybody fanning your complacency, flattering you for what you are, with no one to care or give an understanding thought to what you feel it is in you to become."

"I don't wonder," she went on vehemently, "that some poor millionaires, in their efforts to break away from the monotony of their existence, do all sorts of stupid things, such as drinking, gambling, or running off with other men's wives—trying to satisfy an impulse they can neither stifle nor understand. I'm sure if they only knew something better, they'd do it. But they lack imagination, so they go on with such poor makeshifts at living as they can devise, trying to scale the artificial walls that shut them out from Life's big thrills and big achievements."

She paused as though searching deep for some words to match her feeling. "That is what David has done for me. Since he has come there is something in my heart that makes me remember that line of Lowell's, about 'leaping life's narrow bars to claim one's birthright with the hosts of heaven.'"

"It's strange what somersaults one's ideas turn," she went on, allowing her fancy free play along the by-paths of her mind. "My idea of happiness now doesn't even take into account the long list of things I used to think were its essential ingredients. The big thing, I have come to see, is to be able to risk all these and find one's happiness either with them or without them, but in neither case dependent on them."

Something in Charleston's presence drew out her confidences. "These days it seems as though I had climbed to the top of a turret tower in a fairy castle in Spain, and were looking out on endless vistas, and far horizons, big with mystery."

Some lines from Euripides he had often repeated to himself exultantly, dreaming of what was in store for him, came dully now to Charleston's mind:

> "There be many shapes of mystery,
> God brings to be, past hope or fear.
> And the end men look for cometh not,
> And a path is there where no man thought.
> So hath it happened here!"

After a moment's silence, which Charleston made no effort to break, Mathilde put her hands from her in swift appeal, and the words that came to her lips were from a prayer of Thomas à Kempis: "I want so to be made 'fit to love, strong to endure, steadfast to persevere!'"

Then slipping back into a lighter vein, as a craft that has adventured far out to sea turns to the shelter of more quiet waters:

"Of course my feeling for David has re-acted beautifully on Daddy. Whatever I set my heart on, he is sure to come round to in the end. And even Aunt Myra has been forced to admit, after going over the ground with a microscope, that personally, financially, intellectually and morally, as well as genealogically, David is all right. But she still balks at his politics. She ought to be proud, instead of just resigned, as though I were throwing myself away and becoming a martyr. I should love David just the same"—there was a defiant little ring in her voice—"if I believed he was destined to fail; but he is not the sort of man that can fail. Somehow one feels all the elements and forces of Nature are fighting for him, with him; he is so sure of himself, of getting what he wants.

"You know," she confided with a merry little laugh, "he said he wanted me the very first time he saw me, and he was sure he was going to have me too. Where did I meet him? Oh, that's a long drawn-out, beautiful story," she answered in a reminiscent tone, as though she were revolving some happy memory in her mind.

"It was last winter, when I was in Columbus, visiting Governor and Mrs. Hopkins. David dropped in one morning to discuss his railroad bill with the Governor, and as they hadn't finished their business when luncheon was announced, Governor Hopkins invited him to join us. He sat next me at the table, and we got on famously. I had read all sorts of newspaper stories about him, and had gathered from the *Morning Post* that he was a wild-eyed fanatic, whose

one idea was to abolish law and order and usher in a reign of terror. So I almost expected him to pick my pockets, and fully expected him to pick his teeth. Instead of that he was a man of the world to his finger-tips.

"He and the Governor discussed no end of questions that I'd never heard mentioned in polite society, —railroad rates and strikes, and injunctions and agricultural relief,—a regular hodge podge. It had never occurred to me that farmers counted much one way or another, in the scheme of things until I heard David on the subject. It was thrilling, the way he held his own against a seasoned veteran like the Governor, especially in defense of his railroad bill. But the Governor is too good a sport not to appreciate a telling argument even against his own policies; so when David had finished, as there seemed little more to be said on either side, Governor Hopkins good naturedly shifted the conversation and predicted that before many years David would be sitting in his chair, having a chance to wrestle face to face with some of the problems as well as with the politicians that had turned his own hair gray.

"Just then the children began pulling wish-bones. David picked one up and offered it to me. 'In that event,' he laughed, as we pulled the bone, 'I'll wish that the Fates may have a worthy successor to Mrs. Hopkins up their sleeve for me!'

"He looked down at me in such a masterful way that I tingled all over, and then—what do you suppose happened?" Mathilde demanded breathlessly. "Something that never has happened before or since, I verily believe. That wish-bone split up so evenly that there wasn't a hair's breadth's difference between the pieces

we held. The children clapped their hands, and I was so surprised I stammered, 'The rule is, the one who gets the longest is married first, and the shortest has his wish. But I don't know what this means.' And David answered like a flash, looking straight at me in the most matter-of-fact, audacious way, 'That means we are going to be married at the same time.'

"The children shouted, everybody laughed, and somehow neither of us has ever had a doubt about it from that day to this. Don't you call that a sign from heaven? And don't you think it positive sacrilege after that, for anybody to oppose us? It's such a comfort that you have come back just at the 'zoological' moment. You have no idea what a weight your opinion carries with everybody now. You have gained at least fifty pounds in the family estimation, as well as physically," she added, with a glance at Charleston's broad shoulders and powerful frame. "You will take my part and help me," she went on confidently, "I have been counting on you, and waiting for you."

She did not stop for his answer, feeling sure of it; and he let her talk, getting a silent grip on himself meanwhile, so that his face might not betray the tempest that was raging in his heart. He had schooled himself well in his hospital days to master his emotions, and now while she talked, he was thinking of an operation he had had in Paris when he had refused an anesthetic. How slight the pain had been then, a mere scraping of the bone! But here was mortal agony. And it was she who was doing the surgeon's work, probing to his heart, while he sat there helpless, with no chance now for an anesthetic to deaden the pain, no possibility of flinching, no hope of looking to her afterward for sympathy or approval, since she of

all people was the one who must never know he had suffered.

In very truth his "hour had come." He would see if it was in him, the stuff to play his part. If he could keep his secret he would save her pain, and that he would do at any cost. With the resolve there came a sudden influx of strength, a great calm like that in the interval between two tempests. He encouraged her to tell out all her story. She explained how opposition had only cemented their love. It was such a relief, she said, to be able to talk to someone who understood.

CHAPTER III

THE RENUNCIATION

SHE put out her hand affectionately with the old gesture that he remembered. But she was talking only of herself, and now what were his plans? How long could he stay in Cleveland? Where would he settle in America? Had he accepted that call to Johns Hopkins? Surely it was flattering to begin at the top round of the ladder like that; and wasn't there some one back in Paris? Hadn't he, too, some secret to tell? She had tried to read between the lines in his letters, but it was all work, work, work.

"Yes, that's about what my sentence amounts to, work, at solitary confinement,"—he could even laugh slightly as he answered her. "And that brings me to a disagreeable announcement: Johns Hopkins has given me my choice between staying in America, and going back almost immediately to take charge of some investigations in Europe, and I have decided to go back. It's really too big an opportunity to turn down, though I've been strongly tempted to do it; and have only decided definitely within the last twenty-four hours," he added guardedly. "As I am sailing the 15th, I have barely time to go out to Colorado, wind up some mining interests there, and make my steamer. Of course I shall try hard to stop off in Cleveland on my way back, but it's just possible I can't manage it."

It amazed him to see how commonplace the situation

had suddenly become; what a plausible way of escape that double offer from Johns Hopkins opened up. As he had not mailed his answer it was very simple now; he could change his letter and go back to Europe, away from her.

It made his brain reel to think what havoc one short hour had wrought. Was it possible, he asked himself, that he would not wake and find this a horrible nightmare, her sitting there by him, talking about another man,—her lover!

He found himself getting up clumsily, wondering stupidly if his strength would hold out till he reached the hall, put on his coat, said good-by, and shut the door that shut her out of his life.

The quick tears came to Mathilde's eyes. She sprang up impulsively and came close to where he stood.

"But I never dreamed of that," she protested, "to go straight back and be buried in the dust of libraries and clinics again. You never hinted at anything like that; it's not worth while coming home at all."

"Yes," his voice was steady, "I wanted to come home, and now I want to go back. I am a restless creature, you see, and my work is a capricious mistress. I have to follow where it leads. I am sorry I have been so stupid to-night," he pressed his hand to his forehead, "but my head is splitting with pain. Bad eyes and night work are at the bottom of the business; I'm going to see Alexander in Chicago,—no European oculist can touch him," he explained carelessly. Then in another tone: "I've not said half I wanted to say. But you know surely you can trust me always to be on the side of your happiness." He held out his hand and wondered, as she put both hers in his,

a way she had from a child of giving both as a sign of special affection, what she would do if she knew why his were so cold. His heart craved tempestuously some sign of her compassion. He bent down and touched his lips to her hair. "You have been the good angel of my life, Mathilde; it's worth this journey if you will promise never to leave off playing that rôle."

She gave a sudden start, but his eyes met hers calmly.

"Charleston dear," when she spoke all her affection for him seemed to have made its way into her voice, "there is so much I wanted to say, I can't put it into words, my gladness when I think what you are becoming, and my joy when you tell me I have had my share in this. I hardly know how to analyze my feelings for you, they are so many and so mixed. One minute I feel as though you were my special charge, and another, you seem to have gone far beyond me, to be teaching me things I never knew, and then I wonder how I ever dared to think I could help you. I have gone on with my preaching, but somehow one has a feeling that you have been practising. I can arrange skirmishes on paper, and theories of fights and conquests, but you, you have been on real battlefields and won real victories. It would be foolish for me to go on thinking I could help you; now that your battle is fought and won, you have outgrown the need for me, and"—with a little catch in her voice,—"there is nothing left to do but resign my post of army chaplain."

Charleston caught her hand almost fiercely. "Don't say that, Mathilde, even in jest. The victories you speak of are more yours than mine. I have never bothered much about God and the supernatural; for

me, the Divine, as much as I could grasp of it, has filtered down through you. You saved my life once from a great failure. I want you to know that I have tried to make myself worthy to have you as a kind of guardian angel always, now in this life, and, if there be such a thing, in the life that is to come."

The next instant he found himself out in the darkness, dashing like a madman up the street toward the park where the road lay straight before him for miles and miles at a stretch.

He could not remember how he had taken his leave; but he was conscious of having made some Herculean effort to keep his nerve, to conceal his state of mind, conscious too of having succeeded in controlling his face and his voice until he got outside. There at last alone in the darkness, with his heart free to beat its secret out to the stars, the tempest broke.

It was all plain to him now. How stupid he had been to think that she could read all that was hid in his heart! How insane never to have suspected that while he was plodding away in Paris, she would fall in love with someone else! And how unwarranted in him to dream that she could have understood! It came over him in a great wave of bitterness and despair that she had never suspected, had never known. And she could never know now,—that was the last refinement of this agony; he must live on and never tell her.

The thought maddened him, and he cursed himself for ever having left America; cursed his studies and the science that had monopolized his time; cursed the destiny that had dashed the cup of happiness from his lips just as he had thought it full to overflowing; cursed the man who was to be her husband.

He walked on in the darkness, trying fiercely to stamp out this fire that was raging in his brain and in his soul. Good God! his heart cried out. Was there indeed no escape? Was he to be utterly consumed?

In his despair he seemed to be standing by helpless while the flames did their fiendish work, devouring all that had made life worth living, wiping out in an instant those bright dreams which had been the motive power through all these years, and reducing his ambitions, his aspirations, his very love itself, to a pitiful heap of ashes.

"If all were lost then," half consciously his mind carried out the figure, "if the soul were gone, why should the body linger? If only the fire could finish its work, and the tortured body return to dust, as its hopes had returned to ashes, then the flames would show mercy. But for mere life to be left—all stripped and quivering! How could he go on with it! Why should he?"

For the moment pain had the upper hand; his will, which had so struggled lay prostrate before this mortal agony, and the idea of death flashed across his mind as the one way of escape.

He stopped short, struck with shame that such a thought should have gained entrance even for an instant; a new spirit rose within him to the defense of his reason and his manhood, he clenched his fists as if in the face of an assassin who had stolen upon him from ambush. At least he was no coward, no quitter! He would fight to the end, and he would win! The flames might burn and consume his hope of happiness, there was no help for that; but here, their power should cease. His manhood was to be no victim; his

brain and his soul should still fight on and conquer! Dust and ashes for his heart's desire—but no fire could consume the love in his soul. That should live on and help him to live. Purged of all its dross, he would keep it undefiled. For an instant in his exultation, he forgot the pain, the loss, forgot everything except the battle he was to fight and win.

The moment's pause opened the door to some vagrant memories that were lurking on the threshold of his consciousness, memories which strangely enough had nothing to do with Mathilde. They were all of his clinic days back in Paris, and of Sister Claire, a Red Cross nurse whose life had been spent caring for the wounded on battlefields and in hospitals. There was something in her manner, in the way she dwelt apart from the world's joy, mingling only where she could soothe its pain, that made one sure, even before knowing her story, that some secret sorrow lay buried and beatified in the holy of holies of her life.

One side of her face had been brutally disfigured by an accident just before she was to have been married, but the other side had kept its beauty, while the radiance of the soul within called out in those battle-broken men she nursed an instinctive feeling of reverence and fellowship which found expression in their secret name for her, "Our Lady of the Scars." Charleston's thoughts carried him back to a hospital ward where he had overheard Sister Claire talking to a poor creature who had been brought in after a failure to commit suicide.

"Yes, I know that life is hard, too hard it seemed for me one day, and I was on the point of doing what you tried to do. It was after my accident, when I realized that all my hopes must be buried and put

away for ever. I felt that I could not live on with these scars that had ruined my life. Death was all my soul cried out for, death to end everything. It was a great battle I had to fight, but there came divine strength, for my own was not sufficient. And I did win out, you see; I lived that I might tell you that life may still be worth the living, *even with its scars.*"

The words came back to Charleston now, though they brought no thought of any supernatural strength; he had long since put from him the effort to reconcile the idea of a personal God with his life. But this feeling for Mathilde was divine to him, and from his love for her he began to draw something of the strength to suffer and to conquer that other souls have drawn from the love of God, incarnated in its divinest human form.

After walking for hours, Charleston came back to the hotel exhausted, and dropped into a chair before Mathilde's picture, where the violets still kept their vigil. He sat staring dumbly at the picture, at the violets in their bowl.

For him, then, there was to be always just the picture for his violets and his devotion,—violets for the picture, and allegiance to the far-off ideal, never anything for the woman. His brain was too exhausted to carry the thought further; he fell asleep and dreamed that he was dead: that she had come and put violets in his hand and that her touch had brought him back to life. The quick beating of his heart woke him, and he found himself sitting in the chair, stiff with cold, the morning light stealing in through the open window.

There came an unbearable longing to see her once more before he left, to hear her voice, but the tempestuous beating of his heart at the thought, warned

him that he could not be calm again as he had been the night before. No, the die was cast; a new struggle was on. "When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must,' the youth replies, 'I can.'" He would not look upon her face again until he could do so with perfect calm. He would not speak to her until the day when his voice would betray no emotion, rather till there should be no emotion to betray. And if that day never came, if this fire could not be stamped out, he would not see her again.

"So nigh is God to man"—God seemed infinitely far off, infinitely out of account, to the man struggling, resolving there; but her spirit, the highest he knew, seemed very near, giving him somehow faith and hope for the future, breathing a strange peace into his soul.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANNUNCIATION

THE evening following Charleston's interview with Mathilde, while the train was bearing him across the Kansas prairies, the Ogden library was the scene of another meeting and another parting.

After the door had closed behind David Brandon, whose ring for the first time encircled her finger, Mathilde, instinct with life, awake to love, and thrilling to the joy of both, stood leaning by the fireplace, where the soft glow from the burning logs enveloped her in warmth and light. As after some great burst of music, one remains quiet for a while, unwilling to break the spell, so she stood with lifted head and eyes half closed, as if to keep some perfect vision from fading, her hands tightly clasped to hold as it were safe for all time this new treasure that had been laid in their keeping.

Presently she turned and went swiftly up the stairs to her own room, where from the window she could see the stalwart form of a man swinging down the street, his shoulders squared masterfully against the April wind that came shrieking across Lake Erie, howling defiance at all living things. Instinctively she longed for another sight of the face which matched that exultant step, and it thrilled her to think that this man who was so stern to others, at a word from her could look as he had looked that night. She recalled

the morning a month before, during a stormy session of the legislature, when he had spoken in that clear-cut, deliberate way of his, excoriating the men who were parties to a proposed franchise grab, and holding them and their methods up to the contempt of a public thoroughly aroused by his exposures. She recalled the sequel, how the determination of the opposition to down him at any cost, had only made him the cooler and the keener at outwitting them. Yes, she said to herself, the howling of the elements or of his enemies only made him square those football shoulders of his, the more effectually to resist them.

While everyone was beginning to recognise the sheer intellectual power of David Brandon, it was she, she thought exultantly, who had called out his power to love; who had discovered, in the cold unimpassioned man the world saw, unexplored and unsuspected depths of emotion,—secret springs which she alone was destined to sound to their uttermost.

Looking down at the solitaire on her finger, those mysterious words of the Apocalypse came to her charged with sudden meaning, as she remembered the promise of that "white stone," and cut deep into the heart of it, below the play of light and the beauty that was for all to see, that "new name which no man might know saving he that received it," symbol of that perfect love which finds itself, by losing itself, in a mystic union with its beloved.

She pressed her face against the window, following Brandon with her eyes till his figure grew dim and disappeared in the darkness, dreamily trying still to follow him into that unknown future which lay before them. Well, there would be power in it, she mused, falling back on her first impression of the man; where-

ever he went his power would make itself felt; and love,—her heart beat confidently,—wherever they went together love would surely be. Power and Love, big words both, to flood the future with promise and fulfilment! It was Browning who had joined them together in his conception of Deity. Instinctively the words of Rabbi Ben Ezra came to her lips, and fitting them to her own reverie, she repeated softly to herself:

> "I, who saw Power, see now Love perfect too.
> Perfect I call the Plan; thanks that he is a man."

The familiar words persisted, and with a sense of the infinite possibilities of their union, and that spiritual yearning which was at once the major chord in her life and the key to her deep emotional nature, she made the Rabbi's prayer her own:

> "Maker, remake, complete; I trust what Thou shalt do."

As she turned from the window her eye fell upon a print of Botticelli's "Annunciation", which hung above her desk—the Angel with those shimmering wings of flame, and the maid, half shrinking in the shadow, half bending toward the light, troubled yet exalted at the heavenly vision.

The sight of the picture gave an abrupt turn to Mathilde's thoughts, waking a strange emotion that smote her part with joy and part with pain. Ah, it was not just for themselves then, not merely to complete each other that this Wonder was to be. The Plan was more far-reaching, wider in its scope, stretching beyond their lives on and out into a distant future where new life waited on their coming. The Angel with the lifted finger had a message too for her!

She stood for a moment transfixed by that quivering power of her soul to feel, while swift images crowded her mind of her woman's birthright of joy and pain; then suddenly confused, trembling, the blood mounting her cheeks in crimson waves, she buried her face in her hands as if to shut out from her virgin soul this piercing vision of her heritage. Presently, lifting her head, as though to shake her spirit free from the fetters a false ideal had forged, she turned resolutely and faced the Angel.

"Was it indeed unmaidenly," she asked herself, "to look with unveiled face into Life as it is, as God has made it? Had the scene which the Evangel described so simply, and which the old masters loved to paint, no meaning for the women of to-day? Or was the Message of Motherhood, brought to a maid by an angel from heaven, an everlasting challenge to that mawkish sentimentality which would shroud a woman's holiest mission in ignorance, and hide the light which was her glory?"

As she stood there, the memory came to her of a scene one Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park, when she had stopped for a moment on the outskirts of the crowd, caught by a phrase flung from the speech of a rapt young Socialist carried away by his vision of a triumphant humanity. "The day will come," he had shouted in a hoarse voice, "when the most sacred emblem known to man will be the cradle, not the cross!"

Ah, he was wrong! She had felt it instinctively then; she knew it passionately now in this hour, when the primal spell of the cradle lay white upon her soul, like winter's first snowdrifts upon a virgin soil. Not just life—her whole being had protested; mere physical

life passed on or handed down—that was not the divine end of creation; but life instinct with purpose, life that should lead to service, to sacrifice, if need be to the Cross;—the Cross, no longer the symbol of death, but of the triumphant Life of the Spirit.

The glow of the exalted moment was upon Mathilde, and as she gazed silently at the Angel with the lily, there was upon her face a light such as the old masters used to paint about the head of that Hebrew maid who was to be called the Mother of God, and who has shadowed forth for all time the glory which shall be for the mothers of men.

CHAPTER V

LIBERTY BELL HAWKINS

SHORTLY after her engagement, Mathilde went to Columbus for an Easter week house-party at the home of her friend Helen Jewett, daughter of Andrew Jewett, head of the Ohio Central Railroad system, and one of the men whom Brandon had most directly and persistently antagonized.

Brandon, who was speaking downstate that week, had written Mathilde about some friends of his in Columbus, a Mr. and Mrs. Libby Hawkins, asking her, if she had time during her visit, to arrange to see them. Toward the end of the week, which had been a mad one, overflowing with gaieties of every description, Mathilde suddenly remembered the Hawkinses, and wrote a note inviting them to call.

Liberty Bell Hawkins was a man who derived a large revenue from the manufacture of stove polish and devoted all his leisure and most of his income to the propagation of progressive ideas. A pioneer in the reform field and an all-round crank by instinct, Mr. Hawkins embodied many of those peculiarities which are associated in the popular mind with the rôle of advance agent for unpopular causes.

Some men of his wealth, equally incapable of achieving the necessary modicum of refinement, might have cashed in their very crudities as a species of social

capital. But Libby Hawkins's eccentricities were neither romantic nor picturesque. They were weaknesses rather than marks of distinction, the outward and visible signs of a soul out of harmony with the world as it is, yet unable to create a satisfactory substitute.

An omnivorous reader and delver after truth, he yet gave the impression of being singularly incapable of culture, impervious to the refining influences of polite society. He was, in short, one of those genuinely precious stones that will not take a polish.

If, instead of devoting himself to the thankless task of uplifting the race, Libby Hawkins had deliberately set out to gain a recognized social position, doubtless eventually he would have been able to pass muster in the crowd, but his hopeless predilection for reform principles and reform movements had added the finishing touch that made him finally and irretrievably "impossible." A state of affairs which did not in the least perturb this mild and modest man, who found abundant compensation for his social ostracism in the ample leisure it afforded him for the compilation and production of numerous books which appeared from time to time and had the unmistakable air of having been published at the author's expense.

He had officiated or assisted, in the French sense of the word, at the birth pangs and the death throes of all the reform movements since the Granger and Greenback days, and in spite of an almost Apostolic succession of defeats and disillusionments still maintained a robust faith in "the ultimate triumph of the people," and an undiminished willingness to spend his time and money, whenever a fresh opportunity presented itself, to start a new party or help finance a fresh crusade.

It was only a step from his favorite pastime of launching new parties, to backing recalcitrant members of old parties, and it was a step which in the nature of things Mr. Hawkins might always be counted on to take. At the first blast of Brandon's trumpet, he had rallied promptly to his standard.

Mrs. Hawkins was a quiet little woman who for twenty years had championed her husband's lost causes, ridden his hobbies and nourished his forlorn hopes with something of the devotion she would have lavished upon children made in the image and likeness of Mr. Hawkins, had heaven seen fit to bestow upon her such blessings.

When Mathilde explained to Mrs. Jewett with elaborate carelessness that Mr. and Mrs. Libby Hawkins, "friends of a friend of hers," were to call that afternoon, Mrs. Jewett raised her eyebrows in a manner that indicated a shade of annoyance as well as surprise.

No, she did not know the Hawkinses, she assured Mathilde, but she knew *of* them; the emphasis on that penultimate word seemed to release a volume of significance. They were well-to-do, well-meaning people, she believed. He manufactured chewing gum or laundry soap, or some such commodity. Mrs. Hawkins was well enough in her way. Mathilde gathered instinctively it was not Mrs. Jewett's way.

Mr. Hawkins was a peculiar looking individual, Mrs. Jewett continued with reminiscent relish. He wore side-burns and a Prince Albert coat with black trousers to match, and a robin's egg blue satin tie, looped back like a portière, for the manifest purpose of revealing a diamond stud that glittered in perennial splendor on his shirt front. Such, it appeared, was the indelible impression Mr. Hawkins had left on Mrs.

Jewett's mind, the one and only time she had come in contact with him.

"And his ideas are as grotesque as the rest of his makeup," Mr. Jewett contributed, glancing up from his newspaper.

"But you must have tea for them, my dear," Mrs. Jewett hastened to add, dismissing the subject lightly, "and I shall have Penning excuse you to other callers, so you will have clear sailing," she concluded, with an excess of consideration that affected Mathilde unpleasantly.

Mathilde had been nervous all day; she had been going out constantly during the week, and was really quite exhausted, she told herself. Also, there had been some political talk at a dinner the night before that had not been calculated to quiet her nerves. Someone had voiced the sentiments of the company by remarking that the conservative element in Columbus was going to take steps, at the next election, to bind that demagogue, David Brandon, over to private life to keep the peace.

While Mathilde had not considered this the psychological moment for announcing her engagement, she had longed inordinately for Brandon to walk in and utterly demolish the shoddy pretensions and flimsy assumptions of these people, and then bear her away, to where she could drink in deep breaths of life-giving air at his side. Somehow she was not enjoying her visit as she had expected. Something had gone wrong with the good times she used to have here. Something had gone wrong with this set which used to be so amusing. Perhaps something had gone wrong with herself. At any rate she was worn out and unstrung

from the mad gait she had been going, and wished she were safely back in Cleveland.

Mrs. Jewett's remarks about the Hawkinses put the finishing touch to Mathilde's nervousness, and prepared her for the worst. Nothing, it seemed to her, as she thought over matters while waiting for their arrival, could be worse than a diamond stud. Her feverish imagination fastened itself on that ornament until she became positively obsessed by the thought of it. The fact that she despised herself for a miserable, weak-minded creature, not worthy to look Brandon in the face, had no other effect on her, at the moment, than to give this feeling an even more fantastic grip upon her.

Her last thought, as she went into the room to greet the Hawkinses was to wonder hysterically if Penning, the English butler, had noticed the diamond stud! Before she had time to open her lips and bid them welcome, her mind had registered the fact that the white satin tie Mr. Hawkins was wearing in her honor, fell in flowing lines, covering in its ample folds either the diamond stud itself or the spot on his shirt front which, according to Mrs. Jewett, was sacred to it. The next moment, as Mr. Hawkins put out his hand and crushed hers in an exuberant greeting, her mind and her tingling nerves registered the further fact that the third finger of his left hand was ornamented with a large ruby ring.

Before she had recovered from the shock, Mr. Hawkins was well under way with his opening remarks, and in a voice that was a perfect match for the ruby ring, proceeded to take charge of the conversation.

"Congratulations are in order, we believe; Brandon has let the cat out of the bag, and it is a proud pleasure

to welcome you—may I say—into the family. We reformers," he dwelt with unction on the word,—it was no term of reproach on *his* tongue—"feel just like one big clan, and David Brandon is the flower of our flock. Isn't that so, Mama?"

He held open the conversational door just long enough for Mrs. Hawkins to slip unobtrusively into her accustomed seat and settle down to her accustomed responses. "Yes, dear," she murmured.

"We've been following you in the Society columns, but it looked like we weren't going to get the chance to meet you. You see we aren't much on Society—or rather, Society isn't much on us," he explained with a sly wink, "and I said to Mrs. H. here, "We'll never get through the Jewett door, not if Mrs. Jewett sees us first. We'll have to be satisfied with absent treatments."

Once wound up and set going, it seemed a physical impossibility for Mr. Hawkins to stop even for the purpose of catching his breath.

"You see, we met—or rather, we didn't meet—Mrs. Jewett at a big reception the town gave General Edgar when he came back from the War. Mrs. H. here was on the Ladies' Reception Committee,—you remember that evening, Mama, and how for the life of us we couldn't make out if Mrs. Jewett was near sighted and didn't see us, or if she just plain didn't want to speak on account of that pamphlet I published on the Ohio Central's record."

Mathilde thought of proofs she had recently had which established the painful accuracy of that lady's eyesight, but Mr. Hawkins was at the flood tide of his talk, and she herself was past punctuating even

with an occasional acquiescent murmur this excruciating monologue.

"Well, however that may be, as the poet says, we were ready 'to face even the lion in his den,' to get acquainted with David Brandon's bride to be.

"You know that man sees clearer and straighter and farther than anyone I know—and he dares to say what he thinks on every question that comes up,—whether you like it or not. He's got a real grip on us down here; I'm looking for him to grip the whole state one of these days."

Mathilde took advantage of a momentary pause to divert the conversation along this saving line. She found herself letting go her nervous hold on herself, her voice took on a natural note; she actually managed a smile which broke the ice and began even to melt it.

"He's had the same effect on us all, it seems; I'd like immensely to hear what first struck you about him, how you happened to become such good friends. Do tell me the story over the tea-cups," she added, as Penning set the tray down in front of her, and she began brewing the tea.

Libby cleared his throat and adjusted his tie. Now that the social amenities were disposed of—so far as his own responsibility was concerned—and he had delivered himself of the playful remarks he felt the occasion demanded, he was able to forget his own personality and the proprieties that had weighed so heavily on his spirits and his conversation.

"At first when he came on from Boston I was pretty suspicious about his high-brow ways; his looks were against him,—you know what I mean, he didn't look like the rest of us. Some of our men said he was a combination of an aristocrat and a demagogue, try-

ing to make friends with us for his own ends. But we soon learned he meant business and was in the fight to a finish,—and, what's more that he knew how to put up a better fight than any of us. That day he made his big speech on Railroad Valuation he came out square against the whole bunch of grafters and gave that Cleveland crowd the first knock-out blow they'd had.

"Coming from one of their own kind, it hurt all the more. That's what makes 'em hate him so, they feel he's a traitor to his class.

"But the way he handed it to the working men the next night, telling them that they were actuated by exactly the same sordid motives as capital, and had to get right before they could get their rights, showed he wasn't trying to make himself solid with any class. He puts his proposition up fair and square to men as citizens; it's the good of the state he's bent on—rather than a career for himself, and mark my words," Libby concluded, as he surrendered his cup the third time for tea, "he's going to keep on hammering away till he makes a dent in public opinion and public policies."

Mrs. Hawkins watched Mathilde with fascinated eyes as she performed the double barreled feat of simultaneously pouring tea and carrying on a conversation, ascertaining the number of lumps of sugar required by her guests and their choice between lemon and milk, without either losing her conversational balance, or hopelessly confusing the ingredients.

It was, in Mrs. Hawkins's estimation, a lady-like accomplishment which she herself in the privacy of her own home had made many futile attempts to acquire, and had at last given up as unattainable,

along with a secret ambition she had likewise cherished, to master the art of eating a soft boiled egg out of the shell without any resultant catastrophe.

It is a curious psychological fact which most of us have proved in our own experience,—that the person who does quite easily and naturally some simple thing which we ourselves have tried and failed to do, assumes an importance in our eyes out of all proportion to the face value of the thing he has done.

Mathilde's prowess at the tea table, which so impressed Mrs. Hawkins, was entirely lost on her husband, who had never cherished and in consequence had never been baffled in any ambition along this line. But as Mathilde led him on to speak of Brandon, and by way of compensation drew him out to his full length on the subject of himself, Libby experienced a sense of pervasive comfort and well being which it did not occur to him to associate with Mathilde until he realized, on regretfully taking his leave, that the feeling was indissolubly connected with something extraordinarily exhilarating and inspiring about her presence.

When Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins rose to go, the combativeness that had possessed and unnerved Mathilde of late, had entirely subsided and made way for a relaxed state of mind and body. She no longer had that vindictive feeling that every man's hand was against her, or rather against Brandon, and that in consequence her hand was against every man. On the contrary, she seemed suddenly at peace with all the world.

For a whole hour she had basked in an atmosphere of unadulterated praise and adulation of Brandon. In spite of the side-burns, Mr. Hawkins's face, glowing

with honest admiration as he related various incidents in Brandon's career, seemed almost handsome to Mathilde, while Mrs. Hawkins's quiet assent to all her husband said, the motherly affection she had for Brandon, were like a benediction to Mathilde's perturbed spirit.

She submitted her hand, without wincing either physically or mentally at Mr. Hawkins's parting Knight of Pythias grip. And she felt like embracing Mrs. Hawkins when that little woman shyly congratulated her on having won the love of a man like Brandon, and confided to her that what he needed was a real home, and someone to see that he didn't wear himself out with the strain of these campaigns. She had tried to look after him herself, she said, and there was always a quiet room for him at her house, and some home comforts, when the world was too much with him. If the next time Mathilde came to Columbus she would stop with them, it would be beautiful all around; beautiful for them and beautiful for Brandon. Mathilde gave her hand a grateful little squeeze, and accepted the invitation with shining eyes; picturing to herself with a touch of unwonted vindictiveness Mrs. Jewett's consternation, and relieved at the thought of transferring herself bag and baggage to the company of people who knew Brandon and had the mind and the heart to appreciate him.

CHAPTER VI

PRACTICAL POLITICS

DAVID BRANDON had been elected to the state legislature, as an independent against two discredited hacks nominated by the party machines. For an amateur he had shown a surprising aptitude for politics. So, at least, thought Thomas Burke and Peter Zupke, the two bosses of the State Democratic organization. They had made Congressmen, Governors, and even United States Senators, and for years had helped shape much of the legislation on the statute books of their commonwealth, no matter to which political party it was credited.

Now that the shop-worn type of nominees, with which it had been their custom to supply nominating conventions, had ceased to satisfy the new and fastidious public taste, it occurred to them that Brandon might prove a satisfactory innovation as a candidate. Accordingly, after divers consultations with Thomas Latham, head of the banking house of Latham, Lathrop and Company, and other influential leaders in the financial world, they called upon Brandon, and after a few friendly observations as to his record at Columbus, led genially up to the object of their visit.

"We've been fixing the slate for the next State Convention and some of us believe you'd about fill the bill for Lieutenant Governor," remarked Burke, as he lit a cigar and settled down to business.

"Of course nobody is in politics these days for his health," he continued in a tone of easy camaraderie, "but I've been thinking lately that if you join forces with us we ought to be able to land almost anything we go after. The Lieutenant Governorship is a stepping stone to the Governorship if one can keep one's head and not lose one's footing." Burke paused to see if his audience had caught the full significance of his words, but as Brandon gave no sign other than a swift turning of the keys on his key ring, he proceeded from generalities to particulars.

"It stands to reason we've got to nominate men who can corral the votes. There's no doubt that your kind of talk suits the rank and file these days. I should say you've got about the best line of dope that's being handed out by anybody—almost as good a brand as your cigars," he added appreciatively, flicking the ashes into a tray.

"So far, so good, but now as to one or two details that will have to be taken into account after election, when the time comes for action." Again Burke paused, but as Brandon still gave no sign, he was forced, against his will, and his intentions, to put the proposition more baldly.

"In politics the right sort of team play is half the battle. Naturally we want some assurance that every man on our ticket understands the game and can be counted on to play it circumspectly as befits the nominee of a great party that has always enjoyed the confidence of the dominant business interests in city and state, interests which, of course, it would be a form of political suicide to antagonize."

Burke rolled out the phrases with sonorous unction. Apparently they were a part of the established creed

to which all prospective candidates were expected to subscribe.

Brandon replied in a tone of great deliberation, summing up the salient points for Burke's consideration.

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Burke, as to the importance of understanding just what game we are playing. There never was a time when it so behooved a public man to watch his step, to be sure footed and level headed. Team play, as you say, is essential to success; I believe that you and I, if we pulled together, could control the state, that is,"—with a note of quiet emphasis—"if we pulled in the direction the people have decided to go; toward a more truly democratic and more efficient form of government."

Brandon did not pause to note the effect of his words, but went on in a quite impersonal way.

"Undoubtedly the people are ready and looking for leadership, but they insist on knowing where their leaders are going to lead them, whether up a blind alley, or in some will-o-the-wisp chase after rainbows, or forward toward the goal of economic justice on which their hearts and wills are set."

"As to the platform," Brandon continued, "I strongly feel that its details should be worked out along the lines of what might be called constructive conservatism."

"What's the big idea?" asked Burke cautiously.

"It's this: the country is being deluded and misled by extremists in control of capital and extremists in control of labor. Our millionaire radicals are trying to build up a self-destructive financial autocracy, while our proletariat radicals are trying to build up a self-destructive autocracy of labor. While each class sees

clearly that the misguided efforts of the other, if successful, would spell ruin to the country, neither seems to realize that its own efforts are undemocratic and dangerous. The only way I can see to avoid a costly and wholly unnecessary period of class war, is to evolve a policy that will protect the legitimate interests of all and which will appeal to the rational and justice-loving elements of every class."

"How about a business man for Governor?" Burke queried.

"I see no inherent objection to the demand for 'a business man' for Governor, any more than to a demand for a farmer or a working man for Governor, but whatever class a man belongs to, he is available for the Governorship, if at all, not because he belongs to that class, but because he transcends it, because he is bigger and fairer than any class."

"What about 'Big Business?'" Burke demanded, with significant emphasis.

"The Railroads, the Public Service Corporations and big business in general," Brandon replied, without so much as the lift of an eyebrow to indicate that he was aware of any incongruity in their points of view, "must be made to obey the law as scrupulously as are our individual citizens.

"Unquestionably if we insist on this we may lose some of our heavy campaign contributions, but fortunately the rich are not all lined up on the side of crooked business. With the proper leadership, a majority of them could be made to see that a square deal enforced without fear or favor, would be the biggest possible asset to legitimate business as well as to labor and the farmer."

The last words brought matters to a head. There

was a limit to what a man could swallow in the way of effrontery, and Timothy Burke had reached that limit. Outwardly calm, but inwardly raging at having been deliberately turned down by an amateur whose accidental election to the legislature on an off year had given him the preposterous idea that he could dictate policies to the party organization, Burke pleaded a pressing engagement and withdrew himself and his offer simultaneously.

To his surprise Zupke remained, saying he believed he would stay and complete his education at one sitting, on Brandon's "new line of dope."

As Burke suavely bowed himself out, there was a scarcely perceptible shade of stiffening in his usually affable manner, which Brandon was quick to note and understand. He knew that henceforth he could count on Burke's antagonism to a finish.

An hour later, on leaving, Zupke said, "If you can once get the rank and file of the people to consider your policies on their merits,—you win! When you hit on a publicity plan that will put the idea across big, give me the tip and I'll get behind you. I like you, and I like what you stand for, but I'm a politician not a statesman. I'm for the common people, and I'm for my country against its enemies, inside as well as out, but I always play to win. 'Leading a forlorn hope' has never been my long suit."

The next autumn when Brandon came up for re-election to the Legislature he was defeated by an unknown young man with an irreproachable past whose ambition for quick political preferment had made him easily amenable to the persuasive fallacies of Burke. The platform on which this model young man stood dealt in many glittering generalities as to the need for

higher standards in public life, called in clarion notes upon the People to assert their Rights and declared for a number of vaguely defined "reforms"—which proved that the politicians had not failed to take into account the new direction the wind was beginning to blow. Indeed, everywhere the atmosphere was charged with premonitory signs and warnings that the old order, or rather the old dis-order, was passing. A subtle change was beginning to steal over the legislature. Men were coming to the front in both parties, who were impervious to the arguments of the bi-partisan machine.

The lobby was finding it more and more difficult to conduct its negotiations in the good old free-handed way. The omnipresent dread of exposure hung like a pall over the erstwhile genial spirits of the lobbyists whose time-honored and lucrative profession demanded more and more delicate handling, since the success of the schemes that brought them to the capital was no longer a foregone conclusion.

In view of these signs and portents, it seemed to Brandon the psychological moment for the creation of a People's Lobby, consisting of a research and publicity bureau, manned by fighting experts. One morning, à propos of a suggestion of Libby Hawkins, that together they start a reform daily newspaper, Brandon, who had a genuine respect for Hawkins's devotion to principle as well as for the good he had undoubtedly accomplished by his lavish if somewhat scatterbrained expenditure of energy and money, tactfully sidestepped this latest Hawkins scheme by offering as a substitute his own plan for a People's Lobby.

"The only power," he said, "that can successfully combat organized trickery, falsehood, and corruption, is the power of facts. Once we have established a

bureau that will furnish a steady supply of reliable data on vital issues, the opposition will not be able to pour out money fast enough to offset our machine-gun fire of facts."

The effect of this conversation on Liberty Bell Hawkins was dynamic. The possibility of beating the lobbyists at their own game fired his imagination, opening up a vista of triumphant offensives and reprisals. Once having seen a vision, Libby Hawkins was the last man to be content with half-way measures in making that vision a reality. And being blessed with an elastic mind, he never permitted a sentimental attachment to one good scheme to block the way to a better one.

In the light of the new idea, the old plan of a reform daily newspaper died a natural death on the spot.

"Long live the People's Lobby!" cried Libby, and straightway sealed his allegiance to the venture, by duplicating Brandon's own generous contribution to this latest form of "legislative jack pot."

As an indispensable part of the bureau, Brandon at once organised a state-wide publicity service. From time to time there appeared simultaneously in the independent press, editorials and news articles based on inside information concerning desirable legislation, as well as in regard to vicious measures, and vicious jokers stealthily inserted into good bills. To supplement this publicity, mass meetings were held to endorse or condemn pending measures.

Late in the winter popular interest was aroused to a high pitch by a series of exposures in the House and Senate. Skeletons were unearthed that long had lain forgotten in legislative closets. To cap all, charges of wholesale bribery in connection with the recent elec-

tion of a United States senator were preferred against prominent legislators in both parties. These charges were proven, and the senator was unseated, dragging down with him into disgrace a number of state senators and representatives, including Burke's young candidate with the irreproachable past.

While this affair did much to discredit the bipartisan oligarchy, unfortunately for the time being it side-tracked public interest from measures to men. To Brandon, "boss-baiting" was a mere detail, a means, not an end. Realizing the hopeless futility of dethroning bosses without at the same time destroying bossism, in all his speeches he insisted that it was not good psychology, good morals or good manners to try to make Burke and Loman the goats for the shortcomings of the people of Ohio, since their apparent strength was merely the result of the popular lethargy, ignorance and cowardice.

The only road to freedom, he declared, lay "through scrapping the cumbersome and corroded partisan machines and substituting therefor such weapons of democracy as the short ballot, the preferential primary, and the initiative and referendum. Such a mechanism of popular government would enable the people to become makers of their own laws and masters of their own destinies."

As the campaign of education progressed, slowly but surely, the breach widened between the professional politicians and the great aggregation of human beings commonly known as "the people," spelled with a big or a little "p" according to the exigencies of the occasion and the point of view of the speaker. For example, when a certain magnate gave utterance to his celebrated dictum, "The people be damned," a small

"p" was ample to convey the paucity of his consideration for the rabble. At election times, however, this despised tribe is wont to pass through a glittering metamorphosis, and for a brief, glorified period, poses as *"THE PEOPLE"*—with a large "P" as big as the dome of the Capitol.

But the people in the aggregate are neither as wise nor as foolish as they have been pictured, and no sudden revolution in public opinion took place. Only the seed having been planted, some on stony ground, some among thorns, some on fertile soil, and this last having been carefully cultivated and watered, in the course of time and in accordance with the natural laws of growth, the "increase" came in the form of a profound civic awakening.

Almost imperceptibly at first, and by slow, unrecorded stages, as when the miracle of life takes place in the seed that is hid in the earth, and finally more swiftly, owing to the increased momentum that an aroused public consciousness in all parts of the country lent progressive ideas everywhere, public opinion in the state began to free itself from sluggish resignation to conditions as they were, and to realize its latent power to transform those conditions into at least some semblance of what they should be. As interest became focused upon the question of popular government, Brandon found himself the recognized leader in his state of that great forward-looking movement, partly religious, partly political, which was breaking out simultaneously in different sections of the country, and in both political parties, spreading from state to state like some purifying fire.

Two years after his defeat for the Legislature, Brandon was elected to the State Senate. The reac-

tionaries were becoming more and more disconcerted at the spontaneous endorsement given this man, who without any hard and fast partisan affiliations, was making his own constituency. The conservative newspapers "viewed with alarm the hypnotic spell he seemed to exert over the weak and impressionable mob mind." The "highbrow" who at first had been regarded by the practical politicians with a complacency bordering on contempt, began to assume the proportions of a private menace and a public nuisance. He could no longer be ignored, or even tolerated. He must be politically annihilated. This was the verdict.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLEDGE

SUCH was the state of affairs when Mathilde, during the winter of Brandon's term as state senator, came again to Columbus. This time, true to her promise, she was a guest in the Hawkins home, where she breathed an atmosphere unlike any she had known on previous visits to the capital. Teas, theater parties and balls were exchanged for a round of séances at the state house while ponderous discussions of momentous questions were substituted for the gay banter which had been the order of the day at the Jewetts'. The air was surcharged with problems; vital issues hung heavy over everyone's head. She was constantly coming upon all sorts of queer people, some of whom she found impossible and few of whom she could wholly accept as a matter of course. Indeed, with certain ones it was only their ardent admiration for and championship of Brandon and his ideas that enabled her to put up with them at all.

The fact that Brandon's distinguished bearing was the exception rather than the rule among his political associates, was a source of constant surprise and regret. Had she had the ordering of the Universe, she would have placed generous impulses and high heroism in the breasts of the "best people" and let the noblest ideals take shape in the hearts of men of the world who, after a graceful apprenticeship at leading

cotillions, would develop quite naturally into leaders of crusades. Of course she did not consciously formulate such a theory; but on occasions the idea would flit through her mind that it was too bad the right sort of people so seldom believed in the right sort of thing, and that as a consequence the right sort of thing should so often be advocated by the wrong sort of people. Otherwise all these reforms could be ushered in to music, so to speak, instead of to such discordant sounds.

Several days after her arrival, she woke one morning with a great longing for a change of atmosphere, a whiff of the Jewett life with its comfortable, easy-going point of view, in place of all this agitation that at times almost suffocated her. Heretofore when the flesh-pots of Egypt lured her imagination, she had only to remember the Jewetts' attitude toward Brandon in order to relegate them and their kind, to their proper place, and invest with a new interest, these people who at least had the saving merit of appreciating him. But this morning it was different. Brandon had been called the day before to a conference down state and did not expect to be back until the following morning, so the day stretched before her in deadly monotony, stripped of all its zest and glory. Mrs. Hawkins, who was almost as disconsolate as Mathilde at Brandon's departure, had tried to fill the empty hours with a variety of diversions which proved extremely little to that young woman's liking. With Brandon at her side, or on the platform, any gathering appeared thrilling to Mathilde, but with him absent the people she met and the places to which she was conducted resolved themselves into hopeless bores.

As she listlessly set about the task of dressing, she

recalled with a shiver that she and Mrs. Hawkins were booked that morning for a lecture by Miss Miranda Quarles on the comprehensive subject of "Reform." She had a sudden feeling that she would go mad if she heard any more problems discussed.

Meanwhile Brandon, by dint of working most of the night, had been able to finish his business and catch an early train back to Columbus. He did not know, of course, in what a state of revolt Mathilde's nerves were, but there had been a fine fall of snow the night before that transformed the drab old earth into a dazzling world, new born for lovers, and it seemed to him as he stepped off the train and drank in great draughts of exhilarating air that the only proper business for such a morning was to take Mathilde away off into the white country, and tell her what an adorable creature she was. Instead, therefore, of following the straight and narrow path of duty which led to the Capitol, he chartered a luxurious cutter, and arrived at the Hawkins mansion like some fairy prince, just in time to rescue his lady from her unhappy fate.

Mrs. Hawkins, being at heart far more interested in this particular romance than in the Reform movement, bade the lovers a fervent Godspeed, and set out in search of Miss Quarles for whom she had arranged to call. A woman of massive body and brain, with a soul full of zeal, Miranda Quarles had consecrated herself to the economic, political, and religious enfranchisement of humanity. In some ways she might be considered as the "female of the species," represented by Libby Hawkins. But while Libby was content to be a private in the ranks, the militant spirit of Miss Quarles permitted her to be satisfied with nothing less than the rôle of pathfinder and leader of the vanguard

of progress. She fraternized with equal gusto with communists, dress reformers, Dadaists, Cubists, the advocates of phonetic spelling, and the peace-at-any-pricers. Activity, agitation, propaganda, were as the breath of her nostrils. She had a feverish sense of responsibility for the slowness of mankind's evolution, and was consumed with a desire to convert the world to her own convictions, to whip everybody into line. One was apt to think of her as a cosmic force, a power in the abstract, rather than as a concrete human being.

Ever since Mathilde's arrival in Columbus, Miss Quarles had been awaiting a suitable opportunity for a talk with that young woman, whose education, she gathered from Mrs. Hawkins's innocent answers to her own judicially put questions, had been sadly neglected,—at least so far as the Reform Movement in its various ramifications was concerned. When Mrs. Hawkins had telephoned to ask if she and Mathilde might take her to the lecture and afterwards bring her home to lunch, Miss Quarles felt in her prophetic soul that the predestined moment for Mathilde's capture and conversion was at hand.

While waiting for the limousine she took a mental excursion into the future, mapping out a career for Mathilde as a high priestess of progress. She herself could easily write a few speeches and teach them to Mathilde, who was the sort of person, she reflected, and wore the sort of clothes that appealed to the popular imagination. As Brandon's wife she would make an effective figurehead and add distinction to afternoon programs in smart drawing-rooms. One had to reach all sorts and conditions of people. The

idle rich needed to be aroused. Mathilde could be developed into a capital instrument.

Miss Quarles's musing was interrupted by the arrival of the Hawkins car from which a prosperous whiff of gasoline mounted to her nostrils. Having arranged the details of the future Mrs. Brandon's career in a manner so higly satisfactory, Miss Quarles, as she closed the door behind her, decided on just the remark that would avail gracefully to open up the subject with such a shy bird as Mathilde. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the sight of Mrs. Hawkins seated alone in the limousine, and that lady's cheerful announcement that the bird had flown, filled Miss Quarles with despair and an unreasoning fury against Mrs. Hawkins in lieu of any nearer victim.

Naturally a woman of her limitations and lack of ardor could not be expected to appreciate all that was involved in this announcement, nor to follow the complicated processes that were going on in the soul of Miranda Quarles.

"I told her you would understand, of course," Mrs. Hawkins went on, in that easy-going way of hers. "Brandon didn't realize till the last moment that he could get that early morning train. . . . Do tuck the rug in, my dear. It's chilly, even in this closed car. I hope those foolish young people won't catch their death of cold," she added with a gentle smile that proved how completely the idea of the lovers had crowded out all idea of reforms from her mind.

Meanwhile the thoughts of the lovers, or at least Mathilde's thoughts, were not so far removed as might have been supposed from Miss Miranda Quarles.

"Do you know," Mathilde suddenly exclaimed, setting her confession to the music of the sleigh bells,

"I think I must be a very superficial person; I don't believe it ever would have occurred to me to dig down beneath the surface and get at the real gold of you if you hadn't been such a well-groomed man on top! I'm sure I've no desire to excavate for hidden treasures in that weird Miss Quarles you rescued me from to-day. Several times I have felt her following me with those green eyes of hers, like a cat hanging around a nest just waiting for the little birds to grow into mouthfuls. She fairly makes me creep."

At this point Brandon switched the conversation from Miss Quarles, and demanded if Mathilde never suspected that he himself was waiting impatiently for a certain bird to grow a pair of wings big enough to fly away with. From this the conversation went from bad to worse, judged by ordinary standards of intelligence, all the remarks bearing undeniable witness that these two people's heads were abnormally affected by the action of their hearts. Also there were stretches of long, delicious silence broken only by the jingle of the sleigh bells and the tramp of the horses' feet on the crusted snow.

When they returned to the world of reality, after lunch at the Country Club, the sober-looking interior furnishings of the Hawkins mansion seemed to summon Mathilde's mind involuntarily back to the contemplation of problems. During her visit she had been unconsciously weighing life as she had known it heretofore, over against another phase that was beginning to reveal itself to her, vaguely trying to puzzle a way out, to get her bearings afresh.

As they sat before the fire, watching the flames fashion the logs into whimsical forms, Mathilde's fancy, playing about the idea that had been revolving

in her mind, suddenly gave it fantastic shape. Half seriously, half mockingly, she put the matter up to Brandon, whom she could always trust to catch her thoughts on the wing. If indeed she were to go in for all these new ideas, join the social rough-riders and mount their different hobbies, she had made up her mind to one thing—she would at least wear her own habit, be her own self.

"Do let's sign a pledge never to go in for dress reform; we must leave something for the poor reformers that come after us," she pleaded, gazing appreciatively at the smart gown she was wearing, and thinking indignantly of the extraordinary garment advocated by Miss Quarles.

"And now that I have given you my ultimatum, I'm going upstairs to put on my most fetching frock, just by way of emphasizing my point, and showing where I stand." She pirouetted out of the room on the toes of her high-heeled boots, leaving Brandon to reflect that, in spite of the frivolous manner of the pronunciamento, and the undoubted frivolity of the boots, Mathilde would make a priceless contribution to the Cause, to say nothing of his own happiness, if she would continue to be just herself, casting all her grace and charm into the common lot instead of casting them off. . . .

The following evening Brandon was one of several speakers at a mass meeting called to protest against a franchise grab in which the city council was involved. After the meeting, as Mathilde stood with Mrs. Hawkins in the back of the hall, waiting for Brandon, Miranda Quarles spying them from her seat on the platform, suddenly decided to take the bull by the horns, and herself make the opportunity to speak

to Mathilde which Providence so ignominiously had failed to make for her. Accordingly, she rushed down the aisle, and without wasting time on preliminaries, explained that she intended shortly to organize all the thinking women of the state into one great Society of Uplift, of which she offered Mathilde the presidency.

"As David Brandon's wife, you can become a modern Joan of Arc; amalgamate all the reform forces in the state; help deliver the oppressed and the downtrodden—you've a great chance, a great chance," she ended breathlessly.

Someone came to the rescue just then, and Miss Quarles withdrew leaving Mathilde with an instinctive loathing for the rôle suggested, and a swift feeling of revulsion for the woman, whose manner grated harshly on her sensibilities. She turned to refresh her eyes, to blot out the vision of this odd creature with the sight of Brandon.

He was standing at the far end of the hall, his figure easily distinguishable in a group of which he was the center, unconscious of what everyone who saw him felt and acknowledged without bitterness, what Mathilde's heart was proclaiming exultantly,—that he was not as they. Some subtle quality separated him by a great gulf from these others, even as his physical height lifted him above them. And yet there was something else about him that bridged this gulf, making them forget all the surface differences and know and trust him for the strong, wise man he was—their leader and champion.

But just then, in her impatience to escape from Miss Quarles, Mathilde was not analyzing spiritual values. She did not care to look beneath the surface; she was satisfied with what her glad eyes saw. He

could never be called self-conscious, but when he was least conscious of himself, she thought, when he had forgotten everything but the message he was speaking, or the fight he was waging, he was best to listen to, to look upon. She remembered him the other night, when he had forgotten everything but his love for her. Ah! then, indeed, he was at his best! The lover surpassed the orator or the fighter! She was impatient to have these people melt away and leave them alone together, so that she could hear him speak other words, in another voice, words that were just for her.

"The oppressed and the downtrodden"; she smiled impatiently, dismissing the strange woman and her queer phrases from her mind, as she saw Brandon making his way towards her. She was not thinking of the oppressed and the downtrodden, but of Brandon and their future. She would tread the heights with him!

CHAPTER VIII

THE NOMINATION

THE following summer when the convention of Brandon's party was held to nominate a candidate for governor, the progressive element showed a strength the old leaders had not suspected, and after a desperate fight which foreshadowed the fierce campaign that was to follow, nominated Brandon on the sixteenth ballot.

While many were astonished at the choice of this man who had so antagonized the politicians and the interests that his independent course had been regarded as a form of political suicide, those who understood the situation recognized in him the inevitable standard-bearer of the new crusade, since for years he had been sowing the seed of ideas and ideals which seemed of a sudden to have sprung, full grown, into the platform of a great political party.

Being somewhat of a philosopher as well as a politician Thomas Burke proceeded to adjust himself and his plans to the unexpected situation with an equanimity that might have puzzled a casual observer. His first move was to call on his friend, the enemy, Boss Loman, ostensibly leader of the opposition, but secret ally of Burke in all the questionable legislation he had fathered.

"Accidents will happen in the best regulated conventions," was Loman's facetious greeting as he placed

a box of cigars between them and made sure the door was bolted.

"It was rather a surprise," Burke admitted; "no one had any idea Brandon could pull off a performance like that, but he and Zupke made a strong team. His nomination is only a detail, however, it simply calls for a slight change of tactics on our part. "That's what I've come for," Burke brought his fist down on the table by way of emphasizing the point—"to talk over ways and means of putting that demagogue out of business."

Loman smiled blandly as he blew puffs of smoke into little mounting rings.

"What would you say to putting up Tom Steele?" Burke continued, "he's a crack orator, a good mixer, popular with the rank and file and his corporation connections make him solid with big business. He's 'safe' without being notorious."

"We'll have to pick someone like him," Loman agreed. "I had practically promised the place to Jeff Jones, but that was when we were planning on going up against your candidate," he explained affably. "Jones would be easier to handle than Steele, but his reputation is a bit off color and we can't afford to take any chances this campaign. We've got to put up the decentest and most popular man we can rely on to play the game."

After going over further details of the situation, the two bosses indulged in a final whisky and soda before setting out on their respective ways to arrange the political Punch and Judy show with which every two years they managed to divert and befuddle the voting public.

Ten days later, Loman's party, in convention as-

sembled, solemnly nominated as candidate for Governor, the Hon. Thomas H. Steele, of Cincinnati, a successful lawyer, a patriotic citizen, and a professional exponent of the "sacred rights of property."

The "Gold Dust Twin Bosses" as Zupke goodnaturedly characterized them, expected the fight to be a repetition of former contests between the old guard and the insurgents, but they soon discovered that the unusual combination of progressivism and conservatism which marked Brandon's policies also showed itself in Zupke's political strategy. It became apparent that he and Brandon could play what cards they had, at least as skilfully and energetically as their opponents. Moreover their coffers were not so empty as the proverbial campaign coffers of former martyred champions of the people. Several of the most influential daily papers supported their ticket and an increasing number of the better elements of the business world began to rally to Brandon's standard.

Every day for a fortnight preceding the election, in the leading opposition papers appeared paid advertisements containing two concise statements; first, a denial of one of the deliberate misrepresentations of Brandon's position by his enemies, secondly a statement of his real position. For example:

1. Brandon does *not* advocate the arraigning of class against class.
2. On the contrary he insists that the salvation of the country depends upon the getting together of the best elements of *all* classes.

1. Brandon does *not* favor the confiscation or the dividing up of wealth.
2. He does demand that rich tax dodgers be forced

to conform to the law and that in every possible way the Government shall "shackle cunning as it has already shackled force."

1. Brandon does *not* stand for "mob rule."
2. He does stand for a Government which in fact, as well as in theory, shall be "of the People, by the People and for the People."
1. Brandon does *not* preach revolution.
2. He does preach evolution, by means of a constructive conservation as opposed to the dangerous and destructive extreme of both reaction and radicalism.
1. Brandon is *not* a radical, a socialist, or a communist.
2. He is a progressive who stands for the majesty of the law, to which the most powerful corporation as well as the humblest individual, must bow.

So the fight was on. Money flowed like water into the opposition campaign, even being sent in from surrounding states, for it was felt that this was a pivotal battle which must be won at any cost.

Well known orators, including cabinet members, were imported to warn the voters of the peril that threatened the State in case of the election of Brandon, the adoption of whose policies could only result in business demoralization, and the advent of hard times, unemployment, and bread lines.

Not content with attacking him as a demagogue and a charlatan the opposition made diligent excavations into Brandon's past, in the hope of resurrecting some skeleton, of breathing the breath of life into some putrefying mass. Failing in this, detectives, who shadowed him day and night, were set on his track.

Ingenious traps were set to catch him unawares; ugly rumors, based on the anticipated success of these traps, were diligently circulated, and at the psychological moment a full-fledged scandal was deliberately hatched.

In spite of the vigorous campaign Brandon conducted, it did not seem possible that his scattered forces could hold their own against the well trained and unscrupulous battalions of the bi-partisan machine which so long had dominated politics and ruled the State.

For nearly a generation the will of the people had counted as so slight a thing that even in the face of Brandon's popular victory in the convention, there was little real uneasiness among professional politicians as to the outcome of the election. Even those skilled in reading the signs of the times did not suspect that his nomination amounted to anything more than a preliminary skirmish, the qualifying round that admitted a new reformer into the political arena, where he would have the honor and glory of being speedily done to death for his principles.

Brandon, as he faced the situation and realized the tremendous odds against him, steadied himself with the reflection that even if a victory at the polls were out of the question at present, this was a beginning, an opening wedge to be widened through years of patient prying, till at last the way was clear. If it was a forlorn hope, at least it paved the way for the promise of the future.

CHAPTER IX

MR. OGDEN TAKES A STAND

SO far as Brandon was personally concerned, he would have gone on his way undisturbed, regarding even the venomous onslaughts on his character as mere details of the campaign, signs to mark the slimy depths to which the opposition had sunk in its efforts to confuse the real issues. But when he saw how the lies they concocted and the epithets they hurled tore their way into Mathilde's heart like bursting shrapnel, he was seized with a fervent desire to turn this political fight into a prizefight.

Even harder for her to bear than the columns of abuse in the newspaper, was the knowledge that many of the bitterest attacks on Brandon and much of the vindictive feeling against him originated among her father's associates.

Matthew Ogden was a self-contained man, with an unobtrusive personality that endeared him to a wide circle of friends. Although he never sought to turn his influence to any personal advantage, he was, by sheer force of character and a certain innate almost impersonal power of dominating his fellow-men, perhaps the most influential citizen of Cleveland.

His absence on a six weeks' trip to Wyoming, where he was called shortly before Brandon's nomination, had put the finishing touch to Mathilde's unhappiness, taking from her just when she needed it most the

familiar prop she had always leaned on. More than she would have believed possible, she missed the sense of his big protecting presence, that had sheltered her in every storm and pavillioned her in security and peace.

As her aunt's attitude of armed neutrality offered no sanctuary from the fierce opposition outside, Mathilde left alone, the constant prey of her indignation, worked herself up into a highly nervous state. The only times she really was at peace were those brief hours Brandon snatched from the campaign to spend with her. With him she could face an army of maligners: he was her sun and shield. There was some magic in his presence that turned the poisoned arrows from their course and made them fall futile at her feet.

When news of the nomination reached Mr. Ogden in Wyoming, he regarded Brandon's acceptance as merely a quixotic effort to bring his principles more vividly before the public. It was superb, he said to himself, the man's tenacity and devotion to his ideas. Unquestionably he was a thoroughbred.

Mr. Ogden's attitude towards Brandon gradually had evolved, from distrust of the man and his doctrines, to a growing confidence in, and liking for him, a willingness to give his much-abused political ideas the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, in thinking matters over, he found himself more and more reconciled to his marriage with Mathilde. Now that she had made her choice, he would adopt no lukewarm attitude of resignation to the inevitable, or set up silent but eloquent barriers of disapproval. She should have her heart's desire in this big thing as in the little things. He had only one wish, that overpowered all others, one ambition that overtopped the rest, that Mathilde should

be happy, as happy as he and Brandon working together could make her, for there was to be a real partnership to that end between them now.

He finally had succeeded in convincing himself, while endeavoring for Mathilde's sake to convince his sister, that all this talk about Brandon's being dangerous was hysterical. He was simply far-sighted enough, he explained to the somewhat myopically inclined Miss Ogden, to forecast the future, and fanatical enough to be willing to spend his life and a big part of his fortune in the rather thankless task of educating the people, a task which Miss Ogden, with little first-hand knowledge of the "uncatalogued crowd" was persuaded must of necessity be a long drawn-out and tedious performance.

Doubtless it is too much to expect that a man whose life has gone into the making of the existing order, should contemplate with enthusiasm the tide of progress which is to sweep away standards that so long have served him and his generation. Although Mr. Ogden admitted that eventually, as conditions changed, Brandon's theories might be worked out—"it would take time," he always added guardedly, by way of postponing the evil day.

Thus while his conscious mind had become more or less convinced, his emotions, those feelings which really guide and control and are the secret springs of human action, had not yet been changed. Apparently his subconscious sympathies were still on the side of his old associates and friends.

On his return from Wyoming, however, he was confronted with a situation that called for a decisive stand. On one side, fighting the fight of privilege, stood his personal and business friends, with whose success his

own fortunes were more or less bound up. On the other side stood Brandon, the man Mathilde loved and had promised to marry, fighting for business honor, political decency, and orderly progress.

In this contest, fiercer than any he could remember, Mr. Ogden got his first clear insight into the methods by which the bi-partisan combination, representing predatory business, was attempting to compass its ends by fair means or foul.

Seeing the disastrous effect the campaign already had had on Mathilde, and realizing that the fight would become fiercer and more venomous as election day approached, Mr. Ogden conceived the masculine remedy of a voyage to Japan, and set to work to enlist Brandon's help in putting through this program. In spite of the warmth with which Mr. Ogden urged this plan upon Brandon, for him in turn to urge upon Mathilde, and notwithstanding the fact that he had been looking forward to this trip with her for years, he disliked the idea of going away from Cleveland in the midst of such a struggle. Some men might have welcomed a trip abroad as an easy means of escape from a situation in which conflicting claims created a difficult dilemma, but Mr. Ogden was not accustomed to solving his problems by side-stepping them. Now that his mind was made up, whether he went to Japan or remained in Cleveland, he had no intention of leaving anyone in doubt as to where he stood in this fight.

The opportunity to show his colors soon presented itself at a meeting of the Union Club where the prominent business and professional men of Cleveland met at a luncheon to discuss the political situation.

After several leading citizens had aired their sus-

picions of Brandon and their deep seated antipathy to everything he stood for, Matthew Ogden rose, and, with the knowledge that his action, interpreted by the majority of people as prompted by purely personal motives, would alienate many of his close friends and associates, made the first political speech of his life.

"I think I understand the feeling that has just been expressed, for to a considerable extent and until recently, I shared that feeling myself. But having had occasion to gain a more intimate knowledge of David Brandon and his policies, I have been forced to the conclusion that in the past we business men of Cleveland have fundamentally misunderstood both the man and his program.

"Laying aside all personal and class prejudice, let us examine the situation in a disinterested and cool headed way. You know, and I know, that there are many practices in the business and political world which are unsavory and injurious. Every right-minded business man would like to see these practices done away with and our business and political standards raised to the level we are proud to live up to in our personal relations with each other. Will Boss Burke ever bring about such a change—or Boss Loman, or any candidate that they would be apt to select?

"We know the answer. On the other hand in David Brandon we find a man of unquestioned ability, uncompromising honesty, and proven qualities of leadership who, in order to prepare himself for the impending task of social and economic reconstruction, has devoted many years of study to the efforts of the constructive statesmen of other nations to work out solutions for these same problems.

"The question as it sums itself up in my mind is

this: Because of certain temporary inconveniences and painful readjustments which the carrying out of Brandon's program inevitably would involve, is it possible that the intelligent voters of Ohio—who have a permanent stake in the community—will refuse to accept the services of this highly trained political and economic surgeon, and allow the diseased condition of the body politic to go from bad to worse until the people finally become the victims of some unscrupulous political quack, whose ignorant and violent remedies will prove not only ineffective, but dangerous? In this crisis, I feel it is not David Brandon, but the people of Ohio, who are on trial."

The sensation created at the Club by this speech was only a precursor of the profounder sensation throughout the state when flaring headlines in the evening papers announced that Matthew Ogden, coal baron and business magnate, had followed the example of some of his younger and more progressive business associates and thrown the weight of his influence to Brandon. Mr. Ogden backed up this public profession of faith by a substantial check sent to the manager of Brandon's campaign, the largest contribution that had come that way, the golden tide having long since set in the opposite direction.

Then with characteristic calm, he awaited Mathilde's decision, conscious that at least he had made plain to the business world and to the general public his position, which only recently had become clear in his own mind.

CHAPTER X

A SUBSTITUTE MOTION

ALTHOUGH Brandon had been forced to admit with his lips the wisdom of Mr. Ogden's plan for abducting Mathilde, his heart held an exultant hope that she would repudiate it. When, therefore, in accordance with his promise he broached the subject of Japan, it was with a guilty prayer that the proposition might not prosper at his hands. He could make so much more telling arguments along another line! If only he dared to ask Mathilde to marry him now, and let him carry her off! Though sorely tempted, he manfully refrained from offering this substitute motion and plunged heroically into the business. But Mathilde's patience was at an end before he had more than made a beginning. She fell upon his argument midway and utterly demolished it.

"When it's as much as I can do now to exist, reading all their lies every day with you only as far off as Columbus, what do you suppose would become of me," she demanded indignantly, "away over there in Japan with nothing to do but conjure up all the dreadful things they might be saying about you?"

She spoke with a vehemence that completely reassured Brandon, but even while he stood nonplussed at the amazing and distinctly feminine turn the matter had taken in her hands, he blessed her as he folded her in his arms, for the sublime inconsequentiality of

it. It was so like other arguments he had heard her make during the campaign, when the very intensity of her feeling robbed her of the power to express herself clearly.

As yet her political sense had not developed much beyond a certain passionate capacity to feel the trend of things, and an intuitive championship of whatever he himself believed in. It was enough that ideas happened to be his, a part of his philosophy, for her to pour out all the strength of her body and her soul in their defence. Later, when her emotions had been brought under better control, and she had become accustomed to the atmosphere of combat which was to be the all-pervading atmosphere of his life, he knew she would be able to hold her own against the world.

He was not bothering about the future; the future would take care of itself, or rather he would take care of Mathilde in the future; but it was brutally hard on her, that in the very beginning her love should be put to such a test. If only he could take her away with him now, off to the firing-line, instead of having to leave her to suffer and hold the fort alone!

When Mathilde spoke again, her words seemed like the echo of the thoughts he himself was thinking.

"It's such a miserable lonesome business living on the ragged edge of things, on the outskirts,—discussing ISSUES"—the word burst from her vindictively—"with hateful, stupid people, when all I want or understand, is you! Oh, why are you all so blind? No one sees straight but me and I can't make you and Daddy understand because you're nothing but men, and I am just a woman, but I'd rather die than go to Japan," she ended with a defiant little sob. Then, with her heart beating an exultant pæan, since she was more

sure of his answer than of any lesser blessing under heaven, breathlessly she put the question, her face turned from him, so he might not see her shining eyes.

She knew he was a busy man, but couldn't he possibly take a morning off some day and marry her, so that she could stay with him for the rest of the campaign; the rest of her life?

The solution was so simple and direct, so transparently like herself, and so exactly what he longed for, but had not dared to ask, that Brandon, transported to the seventh heaven, completely forgot mundane matters and was only reminded of an important committee meeting he had come to Cleveland to attend, by the violent ringing of the telephone in an adjoining room and an excited inquiry as to his whereabouts. So he had to hurry from Mathilde, not however, before everything was settled to their mutual satisfaction, and he was in exultant possession of her answer to Mr. Ogden's proposition.

In the hall, as he was leaving, Mathilde had another luminous idea. "After this miserable campaign is over," she assured Brandon, bridging the gulf of the coming weeks by a superb stride of the imagination that landed them safe beyond the chaos of political strife in the lovers' land of Italy, "we will go straight to Amalfi and forget all about this horrid nightmare of politics."

Thus confidently and blissfully did she look forward to a defeat that would give Brandon wholly to her. The election returns were mere details just then, of no importance whatever, and Brandon himself seemed for the time, to have caught the contagion of her unconcern.

CHAPTER XI

REVELATION

SO Brandon married Mathilde on one of his off days during the campaign. While neither of them dreamed that this purely personal affair could have any effect on Brandon's gubernatorial fortunes, as a matter of fact the marriage of Matthew Ogden's daughter to the progressive candidate for Governor was not without its bearing on the political situation.

"All the world loves a lover," and the touch of honeymoon bliss imparted to this bitter campaign added a dash of romance and novelty that had a distinct effect on the popular imagination. There was a suffused radiance about Mathilde, a halo of happiness and pride that one could not help responding to and rejoicing in. Some beautiful things few people notice and other beautiful things no one can ignore. The winsomeness of Mathilde could no more be ignored than moonlight on the water or the glory of a sunset.

People were drawn to her as by a magnet; her personality was a shining mark. She seemed to have a divine right to homage and wherever she went, it was freely given.

Even the opposition newspapers paid their tribute to the charm of the woman, and at political meetings, the curious crowds were as bent on seeing Brandon's bride as on hearing the candidate.

"Genius," as some one has said, "is a certain ardor

of the soul." This spiritual eagerness made itself felt in whatever Mathilde did. Whether she was shaking hands with a conglomerate mass of human beings at a public reception, or submitting to be "snapped" as she entered a waiting automobile, or standing with Brandon on the platform of their car, bowing to a group of people at some way-station, every act was shot through with a radiant zestfulness and joy.

At first the crowds, the mere massing of faces and numbers, fascinated her, stirred her by their very bigness. Then gradually the unwieldiness of this human bulk, its sameness, came over her with a stupefying effect, until finally it ceased to have any particular significance, as a word repeated continuously ends by losing its meaning. Wherever Brandon spoke they applauded or hissed, it seemed to her, in much the same fashion, and went on their way afterward, convinced or unconvinced, agreeing or disagreeing, these people who made up the rank and file.

Apropos of a widely advertised anti-Brandon demonstration by the business men in a small town where Brandon was scheduled to speak, Mathilde flared up in a passion of protest, in which her sense of humor barely saved her indignation from a watery grave.

"It's too ridiculous," she said, "those men have about as much in common with Wall Street as with the Sultan of Sulu, and yet they prate about men of property standing together as solemnly as though they were predestined from the foundation of the world to save the state from you—and Ruin. I daresay they will come from that meeting this evening feeling as puffed up and important as though they were controlling factors in the financial world. It will give the

poor souls for the moment a fictitious and delicious illusion of opulence."

Brandon laughed. "Yes, in spite of the fact that they and their kind are being daily crowded to the wall and devoured in shoals, they are so dazzled by the glamour of frenzied finance afar off, that they go on supinely voting to continue the existing system of business wreckage and exploitation. By Jove, you have put your finger on the crux of the matter and given me the clue for my speech tonight."

He walked up and down in silence for a few moments giving his mental machinery a chance to get under way, while Mathilde curled up in a big chair and awaited developments.

"The real issue in this campaign," he said, fitting his words to the rhythm of his slow, deliberate stride, "is not political, nor even economic; it is psychological, for underneath all questions of political and economic methods, is the more fundamental factor of motive. It has been the boast and glory of America that across our sky is written the word opportunity, that the humblest citizen by industry, intelligence and frugality, may reasonably expect to live in comfort, educate his children and attain a competence for his old age.

"This keynote idea of our American political and economic faith unfortunately has become distorted, until to-day in the minds of millions of our citizens, both rich and poor, a feeling has developed that America owes every citizen an opportunity to exploit not only the natural resources of the country, but his fellow countrymen as well.

"When the methods of railway magnates, oil kings, coal barons, and others, are questioned, it is deemed a sufficient answer to retort: 'But what would we have

done without these men? Are not their millions merely the compensation society pays them for services rendered?'

"While this point is well taken, it does not go to the heart of the problem. Many of our great industrial overlords have rendered valuable service to their generation, and for that service are entitled to generous compensation. The question is not whether they should be generously compensated, but how generously.

"There never was a time in the history of the world when business ability was remunerated so extravagantly as to-day. Equal ability in science, art, statecraft, receives a remuneration which in comparison, is but as dust in the balance. Is this rational, or sane or just?"

At this point in the peroration a bell-boy announced a committee of citizens waiting below, whereupon Brandon's audience rose and embraced him appreciatively.

This monologue threw some interesting light on the question that had been troubling Mathilde ever since her visit to the Hawkins home, as to why so many "leading citizens" vigorously opposed men like Brandon and fought every forward step with all the force of their entrenched strength.

After all, she asked herself, was it because they had made, or hoped to make, at least a part of their money by doubtful methods, that they resented so bitterly Brandon's questioning of those methods?

Their smug, supercilious attitude was rapidly becoming intolerable. A phrase from George Eliot came to her: "Mistakes which were the offspring of splendid ambition and meanness of opportunity." How far more tragic she thought, were those lives which in the end could only be summed up as mistakes which

were the offspring of splendor of opportunity and meanness of ambition.

She began to feel within her soul some stirring of the volcanic resentment which smouldered in the breasts of the unprivileged, against those people who, with wealth and ease and every opportunity for intellectual and spiritual development and leadership, were content not only to stand weakly by in the presence of wrong, but to profit by that wrong, to institutionalize it, and to build their civilization upon it. As the weeks went by, she came to look at Brandon with a quickened understanding of his motives; a new sort of pride in his leadership.

"I think I am beginning to understand now," she said to him toward the close of the campaign, in one of those rare intervals when they were left alone for an uninterrupted hour's chat, "how a Lost Cause can make its appeal to one. The people I know have all been so prosperous," she spoke apologetically, "that I haven't come in contact with many failures: I mean people who have failed in a worldly sense, just because their lives were pitched too high for the world to understand, like the artist whose greatest pictures aren't appreciated till long after he's dead, or the dreamer whose dream can't be realized in his day.

"People who go in for mere superficial success, the tinsel kind, and are content with that, seem so tame and commonplace; their spirits lack distinction. But the high failures," Mathilde went on, picking her way along the crowded thoroughfare of her thoughts, "idealists who face defeat with courage and dare to go under,—they are what move me, stir me most. I think it was that spirit which first appealed to me in you, the splendid audacity of being willing to make

even a losing fight for the sake of the Thing you believed in. I knew I would rather fight and fail with you for your high ends, than win with anyone else, on the other side!"

Each time the curtain lifted and he got a fresh glimpse of what Mathilde was beginning to mean to him, Brandon said to himself that he knew now why no woman had ever appealed to him before, why she was the only one he had wanted for a wife. His work had meant too much for him to be willing to risk it in any wise or for any woman! Then she had come and breathed the breath of life into every thought he had, into every hope he cherished. She was the one woman in the world with this gift of life for him!

Oblivious of the fact that he had been wholly and irretrievably in love with Mathilde before he had stopped to consider whether she would help or hinder his work, he was content to know, after the deed was done, that she measured up to the ideal he had always dimly cherished.

As an artist stands before a picture he has painted in some swift flash of inspiration, and with the cry on his lips: *"Non nobis, non nobis!"* instinctively bows before the Unseen that has wrought this miracle through him, so Brandon stood awed in the presence of the mystery of his marriage with Mathilde, which in its perfection was the likest to a miracle his heart had ever known.

Everything was there, he thought, everything he would have asked if he had knelt before some mystic shrine, and called on the high heavens to incarnate his heart's desire. The marvel of it all lent to his abstract conception of Deity perhaps the nearest approach to

a personal touch it had ever felt. Impelled by a strange impulse that he did not seek to understand, his heart cried out its dumb gratitude to the Giver of this perfect Gift.

CHAPTER XII

THE ELECTION

AS election day approached and the excitement grew more intense, Mathilde was consumed with eagerness not only to see Brandon win, but to see his cause triumph, for of late the idea of his personal victory had become merged in her mind with the triumph of the people he was fighting for. The People—she was beginning for the first time to sense the concrete meaning of that abstract term—were for him, behind him; they believed in him, loved him. The People, those great crowds she remembered everywhere, those moving masses of human beings, separate and distinct, yet a part of each other as the waves are a part of the sea, —they were always advancing, moving forward, now by halting steps, now by mighty strides. Their victory was as sure as the tides, for the same elemental force which men must bow before or break beneath is behind the movements of the tides and the Progress of the People: "Some call it evolution, others call it God."

It amazed Mathilde as she looked back to think how blind she had been. She found it difficult to believe herself the same person who a short time before so complacently had planned to sail for Amalfi after Brandon's defeat. The little world she had known and lived in all these years had burst its narrow bonds and she was out in the open, exultant, in sight of her Self at last!

One night as they were being whirled to a meeting, she gave Brandon some of her woman's reasons for knowing he must surely win. She was sure that for him not to win would spell disaster for the state. It was preposterous, unbelievable, she insisted, that the people of Ohio should allow him to be defeated; lose the shining chance to have him at their head. For answer Brandon handed her an editorial about himself in the morning newspaper, which fairly oozed vitriol. After reading it she tossed it aside without wasting her breath in comment or protest.

"I do believe you are immune at last," Brandon laughed. "If a thing like that doesn't create a ripple, there has been some miracle somewhere."

"There's nothing supernatural," she had just time to retort as the car stopped in front of the opera house, where a cheering crowd had gathered. "Can't you see, you foolish man, that it makes all the difference in the world, your being my *husband,* instead of just my *candidate*?"

Mathilde's confidence in Brandon's victory proved well founded, and when he was elected, she knew it was no vulgar success that crowned his efforts. The high idealism he had brought into the campaign had lifted it out of the range of the ordinary scramble for office and made his triumph a moral achievement. The People, thoroughly aroused, loved him for the enemies he had made, and those enemies powerful when the popular conscience and intelligence slumbered, were like chaff before the fury of the wind when the public mind and heart were stirred.

The newspapers spoke of Brandon as the "man of the hour," and it seemed at once a part of the natural

order of things that happiness as well as power should be his portion.

So once again Mathilde found herself in Columbus, this time, by a happy coincidence, chatelaine of the Jewett house which Brandon had leased for the executive mansion during the term of his office, a period which Andrew Jewett, for reasons best known to himself, had elected to spend abroad. As time went by, it became apparent to those who had eyes to see beneath the surface, that the elect lady was bringing to the mansion, not only the atmosphere of a gracious personality and the charm of her radiant youth, but something deeper than charm, harder to define than personality, a kind of spiritual exhilaration that seemed to result from her own passionate pursuit of the highest in measures and in men. In whatever company she entered, in whatever situation she found herself, there came with her a clear draught of lifegiving air before which pettiness and meanness vanished as darkness before sunlight.

There was absolutely nothing in her of the poser, no inclination to preach, and one might know her many days without coming full upon her hidden spirit, but those who were at all sensitive to spiritual forces were drawn instinctively to this woman of quick sympathy and ready understanding, who had the rare power of possessing her soul in the limelight without losing her delicacy or sincerity, or strength.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RUG KEEPS ITS SECRET

THE room in Paris to which Charleston had come back after his dreams faded, to take up his life of hard work, was eloquent of the dual nature of the man, of the struggle always going on within him between his passion for beauty, the instinctive idealism of the poet, and the stern asceticism of the man of science who held the sceptre and laid down the law of his life.

A grinning skeleton with a portion of its backbone missing stood propped against the side of the bookcase with an air of uncanny jauntiness, while directly opposite, as if symbolizing the miracle of Life when the Master Creator and Builder of men breathes His breath into beings whom He wills to make divine—a figure of Rodin's "Age of Bronze" stood listening to the far-off haunting voice of the soul that was waking within.

A vari-colored manikin, which unblinkingly exposed its entire organism to the view of the passer-by, and rows of sombre looking medical and scientific books at the far end of the room, bespoke the scientist, but the worn little volumes on the table, Marcus Aurelius, Maeterlinck, Emerson, Whitman, and Omar were of the poet. In the poet's corner too, hung a blurred etching signed by Whistler.

In a niche in the wall which reminded one of those

wayside sanctuaries wherein the Italian peasants love to enshrine their madonnas, stood Mathilde's picture in its silver frame and beside it, a bowl of violets.

One evening shortly after Mathilde's marriage, Charleston sat reading a letter in which she thanked him for his wedding gift, a magnificent Ispahan rug. "Everybody is enchanted with your rug," she wrote, "how could you make up your mind and heart to part with it? It seems to have almost a human quality, to be like some living, breathing thing. But there is something about it even more wonderful than the color and the glow the centuries have left upon it; I seem to feel the imprint of men's spirits, as if somehow there had been wrought into its warp and woof the loves and hopes and fears and despairs of the men and women who have put themselves into the making of it, and of all those who have lived with it since, dreaming their dreams and seeing their visions and then passing out, as if after all it was they who were mortal and the rug which was immortal! What tales it might tell if it had a voice, and what secrets, since it is silent, are safe for all time in its keeping!

"I wonder if you will laugh at my strange fancies, or if, since you have known the rug yourself, you will partly understand and sympathize with them. At any rate I want you to know how much I love and appreciate your perfect gift.

"As I was sitting by it last night, thinking back over my girlhood, your image rose before me; and it seemed as if something out of your life too had made its way into the rug and was calling to me across the years; as if the glow of it was somehow the reflection of a great light that had risen in your soul. Oh, Charleston dear, there was a glow of pride and joy

in my heart that answered back to the glow in the rug, as I thought of what you have become, and I prayed God the light might never fail you.

"The stars send down their light millions of miles to lead us, and I have a sure faith that in the years to come the Star in the East that led the wise men will lead you. That is my prophecy and my prayer.

"MATHILDE."

As Charleston read the letter over and over again in the lonely room where the rug had so often caught and reflected the leaping firelight and the light that leaped in his own soul, Mathilde's words burned themselves into his being and he thanked God in his dumb misery that the rug had kept his secret, that it had spoken to her no word of the darkness that had overtaken him.

The haunting image of Mathilde which her letter called up, refused to be banished by the dusty army of scientists who were waiting on the book shelves to possess themselves of Charleston. There came to him on the wireless waves of memory the words of an Arabian proverb which had first linked the rug in his imagination with Mathilde. In an instant he was back in Cairo where Flaubert had peremptorily ordered him one winter to avert a threatened breakdown. It was there he had bought the rug, bringing it back to Paris to keep him quiet company among his sober books until, as he used to think exultantly, he should take it home to her when at the touch of her feet, the flowers along its border would blossom in purple and red!

Stretched out before the fire, Charleston dreamily set sail again for Egypt, lazily touching at the different

ports of memory, casting anchor where and when his fancy willed, living over again, between long pulls at his pipe, the experiences of that far-off journey which seemed now in retrospect to have had no other purpose than the finding and the purchase of that rug. . . .

On his arrival in Cairo he had been so exhausted he could think of nothing better to do than stroll over in the direction of the Pyramids and lie for hours stretched on the sand, blissfully unconcerned that "forty centuries were looking down on him,"—conscious only that the sun which streamed from the unclouded sky and steeped him in its Oriental warmth, and the soft winds which were the desert's breath of life, were working their swift miracle throughout his being.

He had intended to do a good deal of sight-seeing, but as the days slipped by and the spirit of the place, stealing out of the past like the ghost of dead centuries, laid hold on him, he was more and more content to yield himself to the spell of Egypt, which is greater than any of the sights she has to show. Another time he would try to unlock some of the treasures of the Pharaohs; this once he would be satisfied if he could only find the key!

One afternoon, as he was strolling down a winding street of the old city, Mohammed Ali, one of Cairo's merchant princes, saluted him, inquiring courteously if he would not come in for a cup of coffee, and a look at some curios, if he were so inclined. Charleston walked gracefully, though not unwittingly, into the trap and seated himself in a corner where rich rugs were carelessly strewn about. An Ispahan rug of marvellous texture and color caught his eye, and he went over to examine it more closely, with an instinc-

tive desire to handle such a perfect specimen. Quick to note the interest the rug had awakened in his visitor, Mohammed Ali began to extol the extraordinary taste of a young man who could pick out the best rug in the shop at a glance.

"One can see Monsieur is a connoisseur," he remarked in oily tones. "Monsieur probably has a rare collection of Oriental rugs in his own home. He knows, of course, what a treasure he holds there."

Not inclined to pursue the subject of rugs further, after a careless nod at the Arab and an indulgent glance about the room, Charleston sauntered out, leaving Mohammed Ali to mutter curses upon Christians in general, and this one in particular, on whom he had wasted so much good breath and generous flattery. However, as patience, or at least an outward show of forbearance was an essential part of Mohammed Ali's stock in trade, the next day when Charleston passed the shop he hailed him as an old friend, his genial smile of welcome unclouded by any suggestion of ill humor.

There were many interesting curios, rooms full of them, he explained. Monsieur had only taken time for the briefest glance; perhaps Monsieur was interested in scarabs—he had a famous collection, finer than the Museum. If Monsieur would follow this way, up the stairs—Charleston shook his head and walked over in front of the Ispahan rug as though he were drawn by a magnet.

Ali dropped into a chair by the window and ordered coffee. "One can see the spell that rug casts over the fine, discriminating spirit of Monsieur," he observed. "Monsieur is right—nothing in my entire

establishment is so well worth looking at, to say nothing of purchasing."

Mohammed Ali was seldom guilty of talking shop. He had a large-minded, impersonal way of exhibiting his wares, like a Grand Duke admitting a favored few to a private view of his collection. Any sales he made seemed purely incidental to the main business of his life, which appeared to be that of dispensing Turkish coffee to visiting foreigners, whom he beguiled with bits of cosmopolitan gossip or information concerning the history of rugs and the results of the latest excavations. Carried away by his grand manner, abstracted air, and flattering hospitality, tourists had been known to make large purchases at his shop by way of doing their part toward keeping things on the high plane Ali had established and seemed bent on maintaining.

While apparently devoting all his energies to brewing Charleston a proper cup of coffee, Ali was in reality groping for some clue to the financial status and the present whim of his guest. Did this young man's purse coincide with his taste; could his bank account back up his desires? And did he covet the rug for himself, or was his admiration purely platonic? Charleston, sipping his coffee appreciatively, shed no light on the problem, and Ali was forced to fall back for comfort on what had come to be his working philosophy.

Even if the rug were out of the question, there were always the scarabs, and the pipes and the silver shawls or even the beads. The beads had often proved a saving clause to Mohammed Ali, who kept a supply on hand for the benefit of conscientious people who felt under obligations to buy something after all his im-

pressive manner and black coffee, and who after being adroitly led to inquire the price of various unpretentious looking objects scattered carelessly about, which they discovered to their confusion to be worth fabulous sums, eagerly seized upon the beads, even at the preposterous prices Mohammed Ali quoted, in order to cover their retreat and make their escape once for all time from the hospitable clutches of this crafty descendant of the Persian kings.

Nearly every afternoon Charleston had dropped into Ali's shop, for a chat, perhaps a cup of coffee in passing, and a look at the rug which had been hung in another corner where it showed to even better advantage than before. And each time he saw it he was fascinated afresh. Every day some new beauty, which like a flower had blossomed over night, would challenge him to a futile attempt to analyze its mysterious charm. But he never manifested any curiosity as to the price of the rug, or evinced the slightest desire to own it.

At first the indifference and easy nonchalance of Charleston piqued and yet pleased Mohammed Ali. He was not like certain Americans with whom Ali had had dealings and from the memory of whom his sensitive soul shrank, people who bargained and bickered over everything, taking a naïve pleasure and pride in pitting as they were pleased to think Yankee brains against Levantine wiles; little dreaming that the sliding scale of prices which rose and fell with rhythmic precision in this game of see-saw was a part of the painless, not to say playful, process devised by the Wise Men of the East for the purpose of extracting golden eagles from the pockets of their Western brothers.

But after a week of suspense, the strain began to tell

on Ali's nerves. In the night watches he worked himself into cold sweats trying to figure out just what Charleston intended to do. Though he usually managed to convince himself that in the end he would buy the rug, he was always baffled in the presence of this Sphinx-like young man.

So two weeks went by, and though Charleston had listened to many Oriental tales from Mohammed Ali, and enjoyed numerous cups of coffee at his hands, the subject of a price or a purchaser for the rug had never been mentioned.

At the end of the third week, Mohammed Ali conceived a plan whereby Charleston should be forced to declare his intentions, if indeed he had any, in regard to the rug. The following afternoon, when he sauntered into the shop the rug was no longer in its accustomed corner. In answer to his careless question as to where it had been moved, Mohammed Ali explained in a voice that shook in its effort to be steady, that he had had of course no inkling that Monsieur desired the rug; if such an idea had occurred to him no other purchaser would have been considered; therefore, when a certain American, a well-known rug merchant and connoisseur, had come to the shop yesterday, a few moments after Charleston had left, and demanded that rug instantly—for this gentleman had not hesitated after seeing the rug, the value of which he at once realized—there was nothing for a poor dealer like himself to do—greatly in need of money to keep up a large establishment, the greatest place in Cairo, with branch offies at Assuan and Tunis and a shop in New York—but sell it. So it was sold and packed ready to be delivered, but if Monsieur would care to gaze upon its beauty one last time, Ali would give

orders for the rug to be unpacked and brought down. It would be no trouble to do this, if Monsieur would have the patience to wait five minutes, and any trouble taken for Monsieur was a pleasure. Charleston's reaction to this well thought out and carefully executed statement was a curious compound of conflicting emotions—impatience with the suave and wordy Arab, whom he more than half suspected of having worked up this plot—an unreasoning fury with the mythical American dealer—disgust with himself for not having bought the rug in the beginning, and determination to have it at any price, now that its threatened loss had served to reveal to him how fiercely his heart was set on its possession.

It was a strange sensation, this sudden revelation of how much he wanted that rug, how indeed he had always wanted it from the first, and had stupidly neglected to stretch out his hand and take it. A feeling of unwonted elation came over him as he reflected that his bank account was big enough to permit him to get anything he wanted, to buy out the whole shop of rugs. Here at last was a chance for his money to work a miracle and get him something he actually coveted.

Charleston was a man of simple, almost austere tastes. Of recent years he had had little use for his big income and he seldom thought of the advantages which it offered him. A bank account such as his was like a gate that would swing wide open at his slightest touch and admit him to a world of pleasures, but he had gone soberly on his way since the love for Mathilde had come into his life, not turning aside for any distractions, bent only on doing his work, making a career and a name which she might bear. There was

no time in his crowded life, no place in the imaginings of his heart, for any outside matters that would delay him or side-track him on the straight, white road that led to her!

While two coolies in a room above hammered vigorously away at some resounding boards, Mohammed Ali feverishly poured coffee, studying his guest intently under his half-closed eyelids.

Meanwhile Charleston was becoming more and more impatient. He was still at a loss to understand why he should be so obsessed with a desire to own this rug. He only knew that he intended to have it now at any cost, to take it back with him to Paris, if for no other reason than to teach that American dealer, in case he really existed, not to meddle with other people's affairs.

Charleston gave a start as he realized he was sailing the next day, and merchant or no merchant, this was his last chance for the rug.

Mohammed Ali's assistant, who had been carefully instructed in his role, made a hasty entrance into the room, followed by two coolies bearing the rug. Bowing low, the assistant expressed a fervent hope that the gentleman had not grown weary waiting while the rug was unboxed. It was a tedious job, he sighed, as it had been packed for its long journey to America.

As Mohammed Ali spread the rug at Charleston's feet, he noted with satisfaction, the quick flush of pleasure on the young man's face.

"There is an old Arabian proverb," Ali remarked carelessly, as he lifted the curtain and let in a flood of sunshine which caught at the colors in the rug, releasing a myriad beauties that were lurking in its depths, "which compares a lovely woman to a beautiful

rug. 'Forever changing, variable as the wind, and most glorious in the light of love.' "

As Charleston drank in the splendor of the rug, which shone and sparkled like a jewel in the Egyptian sunlight, his heart held a shining vision of Mathilde as she would be when love came, when the great fire was kindled in her soul.

"Mathilde," he said to himself; "Mathilde—of course. The rug was no whim after all. It reminds me of her. Naturally I love it, and shall have it."

Glancing at his watch he uttered an exclamation at the lateness of the hour, and picking up his hat and stick, started for the door, while Ali's heart sank within him at the seeming finality of his movements. On the threshold he whirled about to get a good view of Ali's ashy face.

"I see through your game all right, my man, but I have no time to stop and play it out, so let me know your price at once—or rather your mythical merchant's price."

Shaken by conflicting emotions, fear lest if he over reached himself now, this extraordinary young man might turn on his heel and be gone forever, and the exhilarating hope that he might not balk at any price, the avaricious Ali took a mad leap into the dark, naming a sum which, if Charleston had been in any less exalted frame of mind, must surely have given him pause.

"You're a colossal swindler, and descend direct from Ananias, but I have no time to haggle with you," he said, his hand on the door, "so send your rug immediately to the Gezirah Palace, room 206. It's a case of highway robbery, but as I take a particular pleasure in this particular rug, I'll pay your preposterous price.

Come to think of it," he concluded philosophically, "I'd rather pay a good price for this rug than not. Whatever its market value may be, it's worth more to me than even you have dared to ask."

"And," he added, as an after-thought, "for the present that goes with this purchase you may write me out that Arabian proverb about the Woman and the Rug."

* * * * * * *

So his trip to Cairo ended and with it, Charleston's reverie. He shivered as he roused himself and looked guiltily at his watch; he had been dreaming far into the night.

Like a blast from Gabriel's trumpet, that letter from Mathilde had summoned a thousand memories he had thought dead, to a final judgment. Sternly the man rose, a white set look on his face. Henceforth no memories of that dead past should cast even the ghost of a shadow across Mathilde's path!

Crumpling the letter in his hand, Charleston walked over by the fireplace and stood for a long time irresolute as though the Thing he had condemned to die were still fighting for its right to live. There was a glow on his face that did not come from the firelight, for the logs had burned low; gradually the light in his eyes died out as the inner fires spent themselves. At last he tore the letter into tiny bits. As they fluttered down among the dying embers, there shot up a sudden flame which was like the sacrificial fire on which Charleston laid the burnt offering of his youth.

The atmosphere of the room seemed of a sudden to undergo a subtle change, corresponding to the changed mood of the man. The fire flickered and went out: the

picture of the young girl slipped back among the shadows; even the violets which had breathed out their fragrance in the firelit room, seemed to be holding their breath in the chill air. The bronze figure of the listening Youth could no longer be distinguished in the dark; only the skeleton stood out, a ghastly whiteness against the background of dusty books

CHAPTER XIV

BRIDGING THE GULF

AT the close of Mathilde's third year in the mansion Charleston returned to America. The years that had gone by since that other homecoming of his had dealt sternly with him, but he was ready at last to come back and face a situation which his growing mastery of himself had robbed of the power to crush and overwhelm him.

As he sat on the deck smoking, looking out over the stretch of water beyond which lay America and his work, he thought of that other voyage he had made, of all his high hopes, of the plans he had meant to put through. How mad and masterful he had been! How sure of himself, of his destiny, of her! "Master of his fate, captain of his soul": the words seemed like a hollow mockery to him now. No shipwrecked sailor, lashed to the mast in the faint hope that the fury of the winds might spare him, ever felt more completely at the mercy of the power of the night and the press of the storm than did Charleston on his return to Europe after that first homecoming.

All life's waves and billows had gone over him since then, sweeping the decks clear, carrying off all the precious cargo with which his ship had gone freighted from youth's harbor to sail the high seas and win the haven of his heart's desire. But through all the stress and storm he had clung to his ideal of her; gradually

a calm had come over the waters; the tempest raged no more about him, and the man was saved, saved by his faith in his love, from the unknown darkness and the unfathomable deeps of despair.

Well, he said to himself, life was to be of a different color from what he had fancied in those eager, passionate days. It was to take on a more sober hue, but purpose and aim would still be there to give it a certain brightness; and his love for her that could never fade, should be the scarlet thread of beauty flashing through all the fabric of existence; making work still worth the doing and life still worth the living; and love, if only for love's spirit's sake, still richly worth the loving . . .

It was after dark when his train pulled into the station at Columbus, and Charleston hurried to the automobile, which the Governor had wired would bring him to the mansion.

At last the hour had come for which he had been waiting, the hour he had been schooling himself to meet, as he knew it must be met, in a spirit of loyalty to Mathilde and her husband and forgetfulness of himself. So only might he bridge the gulf that lay between her and him. Once tested and proved, he felt in his soul the bridge would stand for eternity, that henceforth his feet could pass over it in honor to where she stood.

He awaited that test as an inventor awaits the final proving of an invention on which his life's success is staked. Had he but realized the truth he would not have feared the issue. All these silent years the bridge had been building. All that was best and most heroic in the man had gone into its strengthening,—his passionate loyalty to the woman who stood to him for

what was most sacred in life, the lonely effort of those years of struggle, the mental anguish and physical torture that were witness to the agony of his renunciation, the final triumph of his spirit; all these had gone into the making of the bridge, to remain a part of it forever.

It had been a gala day at the Capitol, with splendid ceremonies to mark the dedication of the Hall of Scientific Research which Amos Carmichael, a multimillionaire philanthropist, had presented, and the governor had accepted for the state. The chief addresses had been made by M. Monod, the French Ambassador, newly arrived in America, and Dr. Green, President of one of our great universities. A dinner given by the governor and Mrs. Brandon to the distinguished guests was to end the program. As Charleston's car entered the executive grounds, he could see the stately mansion at the end of the avenue, brilliantly lighted. He was preparing to follow the man who met him at the door with a message that the governor and Mrs. Brandon were receiving their guests and would delay dinner, when Mathilde, who had been watching for him, darted out of an adjoining room and welcomed him with a cry of joy.

His words came slowly as he looked down at her and felt anew the spell her presence always had for him.

"What elixir do you use, Mathilde?" he asked gravely. "It's absurd! You are younger and lovelier than when I went away."

"Happiness," she answered gaily, sweeping him a little curtsey. "I have been drinking great draughts of it. And you," she added, eyeing him with affectionate approval, "you look just as old and just as

distinguished as you really are, which is a solid compliment I am giving you in exchange for all your flattery."

Seeing her husband, who stood with his back to the doorway as if searching for her among the guests, she called impulsively:

"David, come quick; I don't want you two men to wait another minute to know each other."

As the men shook hands, the governor said heartily, "I have taken you on faith so long, seeing you through Mathilde's eyes, it is going to be a pleasure to know you for myself. If, as she claims," he added, surveying Charleston's six feet two inches admiringly, "she really 'raised' you, allow me to say she deserves great credit for having raised you so high in the world, and in your profession."

"I hope to be a credit to her bringing up," Charleston replied in his deep musical voice; "so I'll begin by making a lightning toilet and joining you in five minutes." He started up the stairs, while Mathilde, with a gay little wave of her hand, went back to her guests.

So the meeting was over, Charleston said to himself, as he set about changing his clothes. So far, so good. The first trial crossing had been made and the bridge stood firm. The French say, "It's only the first step that costs," he added, carrying out the metaphor as he unlaced his boots, "Well, they lie. Every step is going to cost, and to cost its weight in pain—But it shan't cost anybody else a twinge, least of all Her," he pronounced solemnly, as though he were registering a vow. Then thrilling as he recalled that glimpse of her, "It's worth any price to be able to come back and look into her face again, to know that she's happy, and that she doesn't dream I'm not. Thank heaven, there's no

spilt milk to cry over; everything can go on, so far as she will ever know, just as it always has been, as she wants it to be, and sees no reason for its not being—bless her blind, unsuspecting little soul! So be it," he concluded, putting the finishing touch to his toilet and his philosophy.

As he entered the hall, Mathilde was standing at the far end of the drawing-room, talking with the Ambassador and Dr. Green, and he noted even at that distance a new touch of dignity added to her girlish grace, a glow about the woman who seemed to have fulfilled all the radiant promise of her girlhood.

Mathilde presented him to the two men with a little note of proprietary pride in her voice that made Charleston tingle with pleasure.

"I want very much to have you know Dr. Bryce, of all my kinsmen the one of whom I am most proud. I have never quite forgiven the fates their stupid slip of the pen that wrote him down my cousin instead of my brother."

"I knew all of Dr. Bryce's titles to distinction except this last and most important one," President Green responded. "My university has long had her eye on him—she is very avaricious when it comes to pure gold for her faculty."

"As has been evidenced by her choice of president," Mathilde retorted, as Dr. Green bowed and moved off in the direction of the lady he was to take in to dinner.

"I want to warn you," Mathilde said in a low voice to Charleston, "the wife of the Secretary of State, who falls to your lot this evening, is an endlessly discursive person, but you have served so long an apprenticeship with me, I know you will be a model listener. Only it *is* tantalizing to have to waste you on Mrs. Kent

to-night, when I have such a lot I'd like to say to you myself," she added, as she turned to take the arm of the Ambassador.

Charleston smiled back at her as he went in search of the garrulous lady. He was glad that official etiquette made it necessary for the seats nearest Mathilde to be given to others so that he might look quietly on from a distance and accustom his eyes to the sight of her in this new and dazzling setting.

She seemed to him the unconscious embodiment of the beauty and distinction about her, as if the sparkle and gaiety, the spirit and grace of the hour, had entered in to form a part of her personality. He was surprised to find what an interest he was taking in the scene; it amazed him to see how naturally his own point of view was making way for hers, how his own misery seemed of a sudden to be swallowed up in her happiness, her glory. It was such a splendid background for her, he mused, the brilliant company, the stately mansion, the atmosphere of adulation.

If her nature had been less large, he thought, all this popularity would have spoiled her as the sun's rays blast the plant that has not taken root. But she had taken deep hold on life, and like the oak, the deeper her roots sank into the earth, the higher she lifted her head to the heavens. She loved life, gloried in it, and glorified life by the very abandon of joy with which she lived.

He contrasted with this scene the sober setting of his own existence; the studied, almost ascetic simplicity that prevailed in the circles where his lot was cast. Assuredly Science had no gilded trappings to bestow, even upon those whom she delighted most to honor. There was no glamour about his career. The

triumphs that had come to him already and those that were in store for him were not of the kind that dazzle the imagination; they were won in the seclusion of laboratories, apart from the crowd. He thought of the decoration the Czar had pinned on the lapel of his coat in recognition of a discovery of his that had been enthusiastically acclaimed by the scientific world; yet few outside that little world had ever heard of it.

Glancing round he took in at one sweep the things that surrounded Mathilde, which he never could have offered her. The familiar notes of one of Verdi's operas floated down from the conservatory, where the orchestra was half hidden behind palms and tropical plants; the music smote on his ears harshly, irritating him. That was only one of the many things that were part of her life now, that he could never have given her!

He smiled grimly at the stupendous folly of having dreamed that a creature like Mathilde could be content anywhere except in the midst of a gay and brilliant company that delighted to do her homage.

What madness had possessed him, he demanded fiercely of himself, all those years he had held to the hope that he could make her happy. What, in truth, had he ever had to give that could weigh against this pomp and brilliance which were as the breath of her nostrils.

Looking up he saw Mathilde smiling across at him. Instantly he was smitten with remorse at having harbored, even for a moment, the suspicion that any superficial success could give the clue to her happiness. Suddenly his vision cleared; his imagination drew rein before a solid wall of facts that rose before him, insurmountable, impassable, calling a halt on all his bitter

regrets. It was not any of these tangible things which had set that seal of radiance on her face, but something else which was above and beyond them all. Her love for Brandon was the secret spring that fed the fountain of her joy.

He found himself thinking back over her girlhood, trying to analyze the mysterious change that had been wrought in her since the passion of her soul had crystallized into this love for Brandon. Always she had radiated affection as lavishly as the sun gives light, as impartially as the wind that moves over the waters filling a hundred sails, speeding each on its own way. But now, a change had come and it was as he had dreamed it would be when the great fire was kindled in her soul. Every fiber of her being had waked to radiant life, and love had unlocked for her the gates of Paradise. Outside the gates she had caught the faint fragrance of love as it had been wafted to her on a hundred idle winds. Unconsciously it had become a part of the air she breathed, of the fragrance that exhaled from her, even before she had come into the garden itself, pressed her face close to the blossoms and drunk deep of their nearer sweetness. But now—Charleston caught his breath quickly as he looked at her across the gulf of flowers that lay between them,—now she had entered the garden at last, and the light on her face was like the glow from the passion flower which she wore at her breast!

CHAPTER XV

BREATH OF SPRING

CHARLESTON was startled out of his reverie by a tremendous clap of thunder, accompanied by vivid flashes of lightning, as an electric storm, such as sometimes breaks the stillness of sultry summer nights, burst in fury outside. The lights in the dining room flickered and went out, leaving the startled guests in darkness. While servants moved swiftly, closing windows, bringing candles and lighting gas jets, Charleston watched the fantastic play of the lightning among the trees, his imagination instantly harnessing it to his musing on Mathilde.

"As the marvel of electricity was only revealed after man had caught and imprisoned the lightning; so," he thought, "only after love was taken captive, had it been set free to do its perfect work."

Half unconsciously his mind followed out the figure —the man of science seeking instinctively among the miracles of science to parallel this miracle of love. The truest symbol of a love like Mathilde's, he said to himself, was indeed the lightning, that vast energy which, after flashing out in the world for aeons of time, spending itself as the plaything of the elements, suddenly had caught from man the secret of its being, the prophecy of its power, and waked to find itself, not the idle expression of the fury of the storm, but the most stupendous force in nature, the electric thrill of the universe, type of the divine spark in man.

"The divine spark"—the words were repeating themselves in Charleston's mind when a salad was placed before him, and he suddenly became aware of a request from Mrs. Kent for salt, followed by an elaborate explanation of how her system called for unusually large quantities of that commodity.

"The divine spark"—his mind zigzagged helplessly in and out amid a labyrinth of metaphors, as he tried in vain to go on with the train of thought the advent of the salad had side-tracked.

Well, he had been a good prophet after all, he assured himself grimly. Everything had come to pass as he had known it would with the exception of a slight detail, a mere mistake as to the man. Instead of having caught fire from his love for her, that had burned in his heart and consumed his being all these years, it was a spark from another that had set her soul aflame . . .

"So, I said to my husband, you never can tell, after all, where lightning will strike." These words, impressively delivered by Mrs. Kent to the man on her left, roused Charleston to a consciousness of the fact that his ears had for some time been deaf to what was going on about him; and he was seized with a momentary fear lest that bromidic lady might be endowed with some occult power of looking into men's hearts and reading their secret thoughts.

But daydreams are made of much the same volatile stuff as other dreams, which, being out of time and space, can be measured in terms of neither. So, although it takes much time and space to set down all that was passing through Charleston's mind, concerning what had been, and what might have been, and never could be now, as a matter of fact his reverie

was bounded on one side by the entrée and on the other side by the salad, and he had been able for the most part like a skillful somnambulist to steer a straight course, keeping his conversational balance and responding with seeming intelligence to various remarks that the ladies on either side from time to time addressed to him.

Having noted the tendency of Charleston's mind to wander far afield, and attributing his abstraction to the fact that he was a stranger, Mrs. Kent threw out a mental lasso, in the form of a question, and hospitably roped him back into the conversation.

"Won't you help me out?" she appealed. "The attorney general and I find ourselves at swords points. What is your opinion, Dr. Bryce?"

Summoned thus suddenly to her rescue in a war of words, the cause and trend of which he was wholly ignorant of, Charleston rose with more gallantry than insight to the occasion.

"I quite agree with you," he responded, in a tone of deep conviction; "it seems to me, if the attorney general will pardon my frankness, that yours is the only logical view of the question."

As a man who catches himself dropping asleep in church stealthily looks around to see if anyone has noticed him nodding, and straightway sits up with an exaggerated show of wide-awakeness, so Charleston now turned to Mrs. Kent with a sudden accession of interest calculated to do away with any feeling of resentment she may have had at his apparent indifference. His flattering attitude completely disarmed the lady who was, if he had but known it, rather accustomed to occasional lapses of attention on the part of her hearers.

Apropos of some reference by Mrs. Kent to Mathilde, Charleston mentioned his relationship, remarking in a matter of fact tone, "I have been studying my cousin this evening, trying to discover what changes these past years have made in her. I have not seen her since her marriage. She is very beautiful to-night. This is a splendid setting for her."

Mrs. Kent, who lavished on Mathilde that wealth of admiration which most people reserve for themselves, enthusiastically set to work to bring Mathilde's history up to date for Charleston, who had no further difficulty in giving her his undivided attention.

"Mrs. Frye and I have been eavesdropping," interposed the attorney general on Mrs. Kent's right, a scholarly man who loved to indulge in occasional analytical sprees. "With Dr. Bryce's return home as an excuse, I wonder if we may not, without doing violence to the amenities, continue this interesting talk about our hostess."

Pushing his plate from him by way of clearing the decks for action, he launched out on the conversational sea.

"Mrs. Brandon is one of the few women I have known who can look at a question from a general point of view. There is something impersonal about her at times, suggestive of the art of Velasquez; at other times, she is so intensely personal that one is apt to imagine her all feeling and impulse."

"A baffling personality, but a most lovable person," pronounced Mrs. Kent.

Not content with this superficial summing up, the attorney general proceeded. "One is puzzled often to know which takes the lead, which really gives the cue, her head or her heart. Of course, as she is a woman,

I should suspect her emotions of having the final word, but her very intuitions have a unique quality about them, as though some hidden current were directing her, steadying her most spontaneous feelings and giving a touch of sweet reasonableness to even her most impulsive actions. On the whole, one gets the impression of perfect team play between her head and her heart."

"I think it would be more accurate to say that there is perfect team play between her heart and Governor Brandon's head," laughed Mrs. Frye. "Nine times out of ten, when you think she is manifesting such ripe judgment and being guided by reason, I warrant you the reasoning process has been worked out laboriously in the back of Brandon's brain."

"In short," said Mrs. Kent, "Mrs. Brandon borrows her logic."

"Borrowing isn't exactly the word," Mrs. Frye responded, "the process of transfer is too subtle for that; it's more like the merging of two chemical elements. You may rest assured Mrs. Brandon doesn't dig into the earth for her treasures of thought, she draws them down out of heaven, or gets them from Brandon. That delicately poised will-o'-the-wisp brain of hers was never meant for the painstaking process of reasoning, any more than her little white hands were fashioned for work. You may depend on it, Brandon does all the mental drudgery in that household.

"In other words," laughed the attorney general, "the governor is the busy bee of the family, reading all the books, going to the bottom of all the philosophies, gathering the intellectual honey from a dozen fields, and storing it up where it is always on tap for her to

sip at her leisure. But in return she illumines his facts with flashes of insight and fancy and leavens his somewhat ponderous information with the saving grace of her humor."

"Exactly," Mrs. Frye agreed. "But if Mrs. Brandon were really possessed of the reasoning qualities some people credit her with, and used them as they imagine she does, all the natural charm of her that we all feel and love would shrivel and evaporate; she'd be just a hard-worked, matter-of-fact logical woman.

"Now *I* am a logical woman; so I know what I am talking about," she ended, waving aside the obvious rejoinder the attorney general was about to make, and offering up her vanity on the altar of her argument.

The two men laughed. "I believe it was Emerson," Charleston contributed, "who said that a man who would voluntarily puzzle out a foreign book in the original when a good translation was available, was on a par with the man who would swim the Charles River instead of using a bridge. Assuredly, since it is given to women to be intuitively wise, to arrive by short cuts or winged flights in a mysterious way all their own, it would seem folly for them to elect to hobble along the circuitous road we men must travel."

"The governor and Mrs. Brandon," summed up the attorney general, "seem to have an ideal arrangement for traveling on each other's tickets, as men and women were meant to do from the beginning. At times her intuitive powers help to speed him on to swift conclusions, while at other times, when no short cuts are possible, she sits back and lets him frank her slowly but safely through to her destination."

"Where she arrives with that perennially fresh air of hers, looking none the worse for the journey," Mrs.

Frye laughed. "So, in neither case, does her conscious mind really do any hard work. Her subconscious mind functions while she calmly sleeps her beauty sleep. Whatever problems aren't solved for her by that painless process, she turns over to Brandon, who undoubtedly lies awake nights working out their solutions."

"By the way, what does your husband think of the appointment of Fulton?" the attorney general asked Mrs. Frye, switching the conversation to a subject of vital interest to the governor's political family.

So Charleston was left once more to follow the trail of his thoughts back to Mathilde. It came over him, as he sat there, that he was happy as he had not been in years; happy as he had thought he never could be again; and it pleased him to think what slight things contributed to deepen his happiness now, as small streams contribute to broaden and deepen the river that flows on its way to the sea.

He was glad the wife of the secretary of state had been allotted to him. Perhaps with no other guest could he have had such an uninterrupted opportunity to study Mathilde. Mrs. Kent's talk, when it had been of Mathilde, had been just what he had craved, and when it was not of her, her very garrulousness had left him free to sit quietly watching Mathilde, hearing the ripple of her laughter, the soft music of her voice. He was glad that he could be glad for all these things; glad he was alive to bear witness in her very presence that his spirit had indeed triumphed over the flesh, and won at last the right to love her.

His eyes turned from her down the brilliantly appointed table to her husband, every inch a man that such a woman could be proud to love. As he looked from the one to the other, the thought stole over him

like the first faint breath of spring that hints at a new life for the earth after the winter's death struggle—that there was no jealousy, no bitterness any longer, scarcely even for the moment, any pain, only a great peace that seemed to pervade his soul and drive out the unrest that had tormented him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PEACE OF GOD

AS it was long after the dinner guests had left that her house guests, the French Ambassador, President Green, and Amos Carmichael said good-night, there had been no opportunity for the talk with Charleston that Mathilde had been counting on.

When the door closed upon these three, she called gaily to her husband, "Now, my dear, come down off the stage and be your real self for Charleston. I want him to know the man I married, not the governor they have made you."

"It's hardly fair to blame it all on others," Brandon responded. "You certainly had a hand in the business."

"You see you're not the only man she has 'raised', " he added, turning to Charleston. Mathilde had left the room for a moment, and he went on in another tone. "Every life she touches she lifts to a higher level. It is surely a bond between us to have been 'raised' by the same woman."

As Brandon spoke, there came to Charleston a feeling of immense gratitude and relief. In this revelation of his faith and friendship, Charleston knew that Mathilde's husband had unconsciously added the final bolt which made the bridge secure.

When Mathilde came back, Brandon was saying, "We need men like you in America to help set right the times that are out of joint."

Charleston smiled in his quiet way. "The body politic seems to be in as great need of surgery as other broken bodies. I gather from the papers you have performed some rather delicate operations yourself, notably your recent railroad bill."

"That reminds me! I am due in my operating room now," Brandon laughed, "a crooked measure that needs straightening out. The roads are trying to slip a joker into our rate bill that will rob it of its force and us of our victory."

"I'm interested in your attitude on the railroad question," said Charleston. "Do you favor government ownership? Of course in Europe, state railways are the rule, and private roads the exception."

"I favor nationalization only as a last resort. I am making government regulation of private railways the main feature of my administration and shall leave no stone unturned to make that regulation a success. A similar effort is being made in other states and in the federal government. But no statesman can afford to ignore the fact that our railroads to-day are being run under a suspended sentence of nationalization. If regulation fails, this suspended sentence cannot possibly be warded off. It is for our railroad magnates themselves to say whether or not regulation shall fail."

"On their own heads, in their own hands," Mathilde quoted, "the sin and the saving lies."

"To change the subject," said Brandon, "I am sorry you turned down that offer from our state university. We were hoping to have you as a neighbor, but Johns Hopkins seems to have a prior claim."

"Baltimore isn't far from Washington, and I have an idea you'll end at the capital sooner or later, prob-

ably ride in on this very railroad issue. That's the way I diagnose your case. The disease will make rapid headway from now on, and, the crisis passed, you'll wake up some morning in the United States Senate. How does the patient's wife like the prospect?" Charleston added, turning to Mathilde, "Are you prepared for the worst?"

"You aren't the first prophet," she laughed. As we were getting into Washington on our belated honeymoon, the porter came up to David and said, 'I believe Washington is your destiny, sir?' "

"Well, I feel now as I felt then," Brandon replied, as he turned to leave the room. "It doesn't really make much difference what the destiny or the destination is, so long as you go with me."

As the door closed behind Brandon, Charleston asked irrelevantly, "Do you remember that day in the canoe at Lake Placid, when you talked to me so condescendingly about my money, and held out the hope that I might make a man of myself in spite of it? You know that attitude of yours has had a lot to do with shaping my financial policy since then. I don't believe I ever told you, but I worked my way through the first year in Paris, just to prove I could, and I took care of cattle going over, and so paid my passage 'like a man!' " He smiled at Mathilde's exclamation.

"The students thought a mysterious maiden aunt must have died and left me a legacy, for after the first year, I changed my tactics a bit and moved my quarters. I took a trip to Egypt later on, and when I came back had that rug in my sitting-room." He looked down at the rug a moment in silence, and added, "This is a much more appropriate place for it, than my top floor in Paris, but it did light up the old barn."

"It would light up the kingdom of darkness," Mathilde said. "You must know how I glory in it, and love it."

"I just wanted you to know about that money," Charleston went on rather disjointedly. "That's the reason I am out here now. I am going west to see what's the matter with it, what can be done to divert it into some useful channels, where it can do something besides double up."

"You talk as if it had the colic," Mathilde laughed.

"And I want you to help me shape another financial policy now, a positive policy, not a negative one. It's easy enough to squander one's money on one's unworthy self, or on the poor, or to throw one's bonds into the fire, but the question of how really to get the most out of it, to turn it to the best account, is a problem in higher mathematics that's not so simple. I've had an idea simmering away in the back of my head,—a great hospital, or rather, a series of hospitals. I want to start a string of lifesaving stations for consumptives, where we can wage a scientific war on tuberculosis; find out its causes and educate the country up to its prevention, and cure. That's my ambition; before I die, I want to do my part in dealing a death blow to this curse of the race."

His eyes glowed and his voice echoed the profound emotion that stirred him.

"I shall want a lot of advice and help from you," he went on, "but as you haven't exactly lived up to the conditions for being head nurse at my hospital, I think I shall have to send over to Paris for our Lady of the Scars."

Mathilde, quick to catch his allusion to their conversation in the canoe, replied in a voice full of pride,

"Charleston, dear, *you* have fulfilled all the conditions anyway. You certainly have won the right to live, by the sweat of your brow, that the Czar has crowned. Do let me see that decoration, and is it really true you are to have the Nobel prize? And who is your 'Lady of the Scars?' " she asked in the same breath.

"I'll tell you about her some other time," Charleston said, as he pulled out his watch. "I know you must be fagged to a finish, with all these notables and I'm not going to let you squander any more of your precious strength on me to-night. We might as well make up our minds to it, you belong to the state now, and the 'family must hold back' or at least be content with scraps of you."

She put out her hands to him, in the old way, and he took them both in his for a moment. "Don't talk of scraps," she said, "it's just superficial bits of me that are passed around in public; I belong now, as always, wholeheartedly and wholesouledly, to mine own people, to those who 'belong to me'—in Emerson's sense of the word—who really understand me and whom I can understand."

"And to those you have helped, and are helping; if you add that I shall come in for a big share of you for value already received. You know," he added whimsically, "I can't even joke seriously about your 'raising me'; it's too real. You did literally bring me up out of a pit."

Mathilde turned to him impulsively. "Charleston, I've been studying your face all evening; there is something wonderful in it; something new and beautiful I have never seen before. I thought at first it was a great happiness."

He interrupted her. "It must have been that; the

reflection of your happiness to-night is enough to make my face shine. I have always wanted you to be happy, and now I know you are, beyond my largest dreams of happiness for you."

She looked up at him, the old appealing note in her voice that he remembered when she spoke of things that touched her deeply.

"Charleston," she said, "I don't believe it's happiness after all, either yours or mine. It's something else, something that goes deeper and lasts longer. You remember that unnamed statue of St. Gaudens in Washington, of the woman with that wonderful look on her face. Some people called it Sorrow, some Resignation, and when they asked St. Gaudens what it was, he said he hardly knew, but sometimes he thought it was the 'Peace of God.' Charleston dear," she put out her hand half playfully, half seriously, "if you weren't the pagan Aunt Myra proclaims you, I'd say it was just *that,* on your face to-night—the Peace of God."

Charleston hesitated. "I don't speak that language and I have never called it by that name, but you are right; something I do not understand has come to me from somewhere and brought peace."

"You know," Mathilde went on slowly, "I've been doing some growing myself in these years. I used to be a narrow-minded person, who thought there was no way of finding God, except my own little way, *à moi.* I even think I used to insist on people's seeing just the side of Him I saw, and calling Him by just the name I called Him, as if He had no name but my little name for Him, and spoke no language but the one that I could speak and understand! Well, thank heaven! I have long since been delivered from the

body of that particular sin. God is so much bigger than I used to think. The God I knew then could never have been equal to the diverse needs of men. The God I am learning to know now, is sufficient. I see He has as many ways of coming to men as there are human needs, that there is no speech nor language, in which men cry out, where His voice may not be heard in answer.

"My husband," she went on, "in his effort to make conditions better, to help give the power to the people, —that is the Voice as it speaks to him. For you It has spoken in another way. I, in my great happiness, seem to hear It calling on me to make the most of my opportunity for service, not so much service for people in the abstract, as for individuals, as I meet them and their lives touch mine, so that the Voice may speak perhaps more clearly to them through me.

"I'm afraid"—she hesitated—"it must sound presumptuous in me to be talking about helping other people to hear that Voice, when I, myself, have never heard it speaking anything but joy; but sometimes I have a strange sure feeling that the Voice will one day speak to me through something other than this perfect happiness. It can't be that always there will be just that for me."

Her eyes had grown dark as she spoke, and her voice trembled with the intensity of her feeling. "People grow most, learn most, through suffering. I have had no big sorrow, no supreme testing, to teach me the things they say one only learns that way. Tell me, Charleston," she cried out, turning to him instinctively, as if for refuge from some wild fear that was pursuing her, "tell me, do you think I'm very

foolish to be afraid that it can't last, such happiness as mine?"

"That's just the kind that does last," Charleston answered gently, as though he were reassuring a frightened child. "Such love and happiness as yours have in them, if anything has, the seeds of immortality. You see," he went on smiling gravely down on her, "I'm preaching your own doctrine to you. The doctrine of eternal life is the only doctrine that is adequate for love."

He spoke impulsively, using the first words that came to his lips,—quite unaware of their significance; intent only on calming this restless mood of hers, with the unconscious instinct of the physician to soothe, the instinct of his whole life to remove any slightest thing that troubled her. Only later his words were to come back fraught with their hidden meaning—when life itself had revealed to him, the divine interpretation of the truth he had uttered, the truth that was at last to set his spirit free. . . .

Alone in his room, after he had bade Mathilde goodnight, the strange peace still persisted. So far at least there was no reaction. He had seen her, talked with her and with her husband; he was in Brandon's house, and he was not afraid. The long agony was over; he had met the supreme test, he had fought his battle and won. The wound would never heal, he was as sure of that, as he was sure, that all the poison, all the sting, had been drawn out of it forever. While there was to be loneliness, there would be no more bitterness, no blind rage, no despair. These had died within him tonight; the seeds of their death had been sown in those long years of agony, and now the harvest of death had

come naturally, almost painlessly, without a final struggle.

It amazed him to see how calmly the great change had been ushered in, as quietly and serenely as the day breaks after a night of storm.

He stood for a long time by the window looking out over the moonlit grounds, thinking of Mathilde's happiness; and as he remembered her words to him that night, he searched and could not find it in his heart to wish that anything had been different. She could not have loved another than her husband, and he, reasoning it all out within himself, knew that he could never love any other woman than Mathilde. This love for her, that he had fought his most desperate fight to save, should henceforth go before him through life's wilderness, "a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night."

CHAPTER XVII

UNDERSTANDING

LONG after midnight the governor stole into his wife's room and stood for a moment watching her. She stirred uneasily in her sleep and suddenly opening her eyes full on him, sat up and seized both his hands.

"It's really you," she cried softly, drawing his head down toward her, "and this is really me. I've just had such a ghastly nightmare—I can't believe yet it was only a dream. I thought I had lost you forever and that all my life was to be spent searching the wide world, knowing I could never find you." She ended with a shudder at the haunting memory her words revived.

"What a foolish little wife to conjure up such evil dreams. It's all the fault of that lobster concoction Emile perpetrated on us in honor of his countryman. I only hope it hasn't had the same effect on the Ambassador," he said lightly, as he turned off the electricity and prepared to go.

"You can joke like that because the nightmare isn't real to you," Mathilde replied in an injured tone. "But if you had just been in its clutches, you couldn't possibly wriggle out so complacently, or have the heart to turn off the light and leave me so soon in the dark, to dream that dreadful dream all over again. Listen, David," sitting up suddenly, to emphasize the im-

portance of her discovery, "it wasn't the lobster or any such nonsense; it was Charleston's face. Something makes me feel he has lost the woman he loves over there in Paris. Either she has refused him, or she has died, or something dreadful has happened, and he has to go on living alone. Oh, how do people stand it?" she cried out, the memory of her dream still strong upon her, "how do people stand it, to go on living without love?"

Little did Mathilde suspect that Charleston, who so often had put this same question in his hours of despair, to-night for the first time was finding the answer. But the man who had learned through suffering, might have responded in that hour of his supreme triumph to the woman who had learned so far, only what joy could teach: "'A man may live without happiness and instead thereof find blessedness.'"

Brandon sat down by her, gathering her in his arms, and instantly all her terror was dissolved in the thought of her safety, her happiness with him. In another minute she was asleep again, dreaming another dream, a dream of perfect love that had come true.

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Alone in his room, the words his wife had spoken of Charleston came back to Brandon, starting a new and unexpected train of thought in his mind. He recalled his own conversation with him that night. Something in the expression of the man's face had struck him at the time, the same look undoubtedly which had haunted Mathilde.

"I'm perfectly sure," her words were echoing in his mind, "that Charleston has lost the woman he loves, over there in Paris."

Her intuition had started her on the right track; but had not been able to lead her all the way; and it was for her husband, who had followed her at first, to take the lead now, reason out the matter, go straight on to the inevitable conclusion.

"The woman he had lost—was Mathilde!" Brandon was staggered by the suddenness, the certainty of his conviction. His thoughts traveled back heavily, step by step, over the way that had led to this conclusion. Scattered instances, incidents to which he had never before given a thought, assembled in his mind from every quarter, taking their place in an orderly sequence as he reasoned. He recalled Mathilde's extraordinary influence over Charleston, her pride in him and in his career;—he knew that his association with her had been like a bright thread the Fates had spun into the warp and woof of his lonely life.

Suddenly he remembered the note in Charleston's voice when he had spoken of Mathilde, the look on his face when he himself had talked to him of her in that intimate way.

He recalled the circumstances of Charleston's trip home, and his return almost immediately to Europe. That had been the spring of Mathilde's engagement, and no member of her family nor anyone of her friends had seemingly ever suspected the truth of which Brandon was suddenly sure. Was it because he was her cousin that no one had suspected? Could that be the reason the man had never spoken? There might be obstacles in the way of such a marriage, but the relationship was surely not so close that such a man as Charleston would surrender without a word the very thought of it!

But perhaps he *had* come home to tell her, that time

five years ago! A hundred thoughts were flashing through Brandon's mind and he caught at each, bewildered, unable to distinguish between the false clues and the true, not knowing whether what he touched for an instant was reality, or only the mocking shadow of his wild imaginings.

A sudden blind fury against Charleston seized him, fury that he should have dared to come back to America, dared to come near Mathilde, to be under their roof. He walked up and down the room, his face livid with rage, his hands clenched convulsively, possessed by a mad impulse to rush at Charleston and drive him out of the house. "Why had he not buried himself forever in Europe?" he demanded hotly. "What right had he ever to look into Mathilde's face again, or speak to her? What right had he ever had to love her?" The folly of the question made him realize suddenly the absurdity, the unreasonableness of his attitude towards Charleston; as if anyone could be blamed for falling in love with Mathilde!

"And yet this man," he said to himself, "had known her, had doubtless loved her all these years; if this were so, he had deliberately given her up without a word, had kept for five years the silence that made it possible now, and natural, for Mathilde to take up the old relationship that had been one of the strong ties of her girlhood."

Brandon marveled at such self-mastery, such complete renunciation. Had Charleston, indeed, no rights, he began to ask himself. Because he had lost forever the right to her love, had he no right to the continuance of an affection which had its deep roots in the reverence and loyalty of his heart? And had Mathilde no rights in this matter? Had her husband

indeed the right to deny her the devotion of this kinsman she had always loved as a brother?

Gradually Brandon's anger died down; his calm judgment reasserted itself.

The vision of Mathilde as she had waked from her dream came back to him; he felt again the thrill of joy that shot through him as she clung to him. The sort of speechless exultation that possessed him, whenever he realized the completeness of their love, was upon him now. Every syllable she had spoken was echoing in his heart.

"I can't conceive how I ever managed to struggle along before we found each other. After all, the dream was true, at least in part, for my heart has been always seeking you, and only when I found you at last did God breathe the breath of life, which was your love, into my soul."

All the poetry, all the love of this radiant creature was his, his for all time and for eternity. The thought of such happiness humbled him, made him ashamed of any passing impulse that could touch with even a breath of fear, the security of this love, the reality of which had outstripped all his dreams, passed all his understanding.

As he realized what he had won, he thought again of Charleston—of all that he had lost—and there was in his heart no vindictiveness, no shadow of jealous rage, only a great compassion, and reverence for the silent heroism of this man. Instinctively he knew that if, after these years, Charleston had trusted himself to come back, all the world might trust him.

He tried to recall what he had said to Charleston about Mathilde, and it came to him that, in the light of what he knew now, he could never have spoken as

he had a few hours before. Nevertheless, he was glad that the words had been spoken; that the seal had thus been set on a friendship which had its birth in the travail of both their souls.

So the thought of Mathilde had "raised" both these men to-night; had drawn the sting from the bitterness of one, and cast out fear from the other's love. To each in a different way, the peace of God, which neither called by that name, had entered in, to keep their hearts and minds. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ELUSIVE CARMICHAEL

THE next morning, as the French Ambassador, President Green, and Amos Carmichael settled themselves in the car which was to take them to the station, M. Monod remarked:

"One of the most agreeable experiences your country has so far given me has been this glimpse of Governor Brandon and his wife in their home. What a couple they are! As I talked with him, I realized he was not only a statesman but a scholar, a man of the world in the large sense of the word. If you will pardon my frankness, I confess I have been surprised by the provincialism of some of your leading politicians. While they know their country, or oftener still perhaps their particular section of the country, many of them seem to lack breadth of view. It was this that struck me about Governor Brandon—his cosmopolitan grasp of problems, of world history as it is in the making. And his wife"—he lifted his shoulders in the typical French way, in despair at finding words to express his feeling, "what a mate she is for him! And what a radiant creature! At first I was captivated by her young grace and beauty; then I talked with her—"; he paused.

"And you forgot how lovely she was in thinking of her wit," President Green laughingly put in. "It's often the other way with pretty women; one forgets how shallow they are in gazing at their loveliness."

"Or rather she talked with me," M. Monod went on. "She discussed conditions in my country, politics, art, Bergson, in that melodious voice of hers, with an accent that carried me back to Paris. Are there many like her in America?" he asked, facing round towards Carmichael.

"There are few like her in any country," the old man responded. "Mrs. Brandon, more than any woman I know, embodies those characteristics that have gone to make up our American measure of a woman. She has beauty, wit, charm; to a unique degree one perceives her soul shining out through all her being."

"That I should call the distinctive note," President Green remarked, "of her personality. She is, as the French say, *spirituelle,* and she has, in addition, that spirituality which men everywhere bow before, 'with that stoop of the soul which in bending, upraises it too.'"

"I don't agree with any of Brandon's political notions," said Carmichael, "and I think it would spell disaster to the country for him to become President, though I fear he's headed that way. But I agree with all anyone can say in praise of his wife. She represents the best this country can produce—in beauty and brains and blood. It would almost reconcile me to having him President, to know she was in the White House, the first lady of the land, in name and in fact, as well as in an old man's fancy."

President Green, whose exalted conception of democracy, and statesmanlike attitude on public questions were rapidly bringing him into political prominence, and who was being widely discussed as a nominee for governor in his state, took up the cudgels in defense

of Brandon. "I believe," he said, "if people, especially business men, were better informed as to the constructive legislation already to Brandon's credit, and had a better understanding of the practical ends he is aiming at, they would be forced to admit that he has never advocated any policies that would not work to the advantage of every legitimate interest. His railroad bill has not only safeguarded the traveling and shipping public, but has protected security holders as well, from the ruthless exploitation of the stock juggler, the grafter, and the railroad wrecker. Moreover, it has protected the efficient and honest railroad manager from the Machiavellian tactics of unprincipled competitors.

"It bids fair to be an important step toward raising railroad operations in this country up to their normal level as a great economic enterprise, conducted along legitimate business lines for a legitimate business profit. For my part," he ended, "I'd like to see Brandon take Colton's seat and inject a few of his saving ideas into the United States Senate."

"Pardon me," interposed the French Ambassador at the conclusion of this monologue, "but that young widow from New York, Mrs. Hobart, struck me as being very handsome. They say Prince Henry pronounced her the most beautiful woman he had seen in the States."

"And I,—the most tiresome," responded Carmichael, ruffled at the memory of certain overtures that lady had made to him. "Why do not women make up their minds, as well as their faces?" he demanded irritably.

"They say," President Green suggested, "that Mrs. Hobart had quite made up *her* mind, when she came on

from New York; it was only a question of *your* mind, and your heart."

"I took rather a fancy to young Bryce," Carmichael remarked, switching the subject abruptly, "he might be just the man for a post in my Foundation; Mrs. Brandon was telling me about his work last night. I may decide to offer him a job," he added pompously, in the tone of a man who has only to make his wishes known in order to see them materialize.

"Dr. Bryce has made a name for himself in European scientific circles. I noticed he wore a decoration from the Czar," said the Ambassador as the car swung round in front of the station.

"What a pleasant surprise!" cried a feminine voice, as Mrs. Hobart, followed by her French maid and a Pekinese poodle, advanced on the party and endeavored to take possession of Amos Carmichael. "I find I have to rush back to New York on important business," she explained breathlessly. "It seems almost foolish to have come so far, for so short a time, but Mrs. Brandon, who is an old school friend of mine, was so set on my being here, and we hadn't seen each other for so long. Besides, it was worth the trip, to be at the dedication of that magnificent building of yours," she added, in a voice raised so that the noise in the station might not prevent Carmichael from catching that last important announcement.

"I am sorry this must be good-day and good-by," Carmichael replied, shaking hands with Mrs. Hobart and looking significantly at his companions. "My train leaves for Chicago in three minutes. My only consolation is that I could not hope to compete with our latest importation from France, her brilliant bach-

elor ambassador, or with our own irresistible President Green, in whose good company I leave you."

With a farewell handshake to the two bewildered men, and an inscrutable look on his face, the little philanthropist marched off in the direction of the Chicago train and safety; leaving his companions to console the beautiful widow, who was at that moment feverishly trying to recall, whether or not she had definitely stated that her business was in New York, and whether in the event that she had not so stated, three minutes would enable her to transfer her luggage, her maid, her poodle and herself to the Chicago train. * * *

CHAPTER XIX

WILDWOOD

UPON the expiration of his second term as governor, Brandon and Mathilde went straight from the executive mansion to their country home near Cleveland, to the quiet beauty of its broad fields of waving wheat and corn, with here and there green stretches of alfalfa and sweet clover, dotted with grazing cattle and sheep.

The house, Wildwood, with the dull greens and browns which it had borrowed along with its name, from the wood nearby, looked as if it had sprung out of the earth and were as integral a part of the landscape as the big trees that sheltered it, or the winding road that led up to it.

Inside, as well as outside, the same tranquil charm prevailed. Indeed, in its way, which was Mathilde's way, from eaves to foundation, for it had been building in her heart and brain long before it was planted in the earth, Wildwood was a masterpiece, the kind of creation that draws from one an instinctive sigh of contentment, that in this imperfect world some things can be so near perfection.

At least that is what Brandon felt every time he came out from the rush and din of the city, to find Mathilde waiting for him on top of the hill that half hid the house from the road, or in the big living-room whose windows looked out over a wild bit of woodland that ran down to meet the lake.

That was particularly what he was thinking one evening in the late fall, as he hurried home with a piece of news that he wanted Mathilde to have first from his lips. But news does not wait on sentiment these prosaic days, and when he saw her face as she ran out to meet him, he knew before she spoke that telephones and telegraph wires had made short work of his tidings.

"You mustn't expect me to be too jubilant just yet," she said, as both arms went round his neck and her mouth puckered up into a fantastic little pout. "Of course I can't say it's sudden, for I knew from the moment old Senator Colton had that 'stroke' what was going to happen. I had a prophetic feeling when we came back to this perfect place, that it was all too good to last, that Senator Colton was too old to last, that you were too big a man for just poor little me, and that *this* was inevitable."

"And if the governor hadn't named me, and Trowbridge were senator now instead?" Brandon began mockingly.

"Naturally, he couldn't have appointed anybody but you, and of course I'm proud all over, and glad; only I just wish and wish Senator Colton had held out one more year, so we could have had a wee bit of time 'off' together.

"We're just like escaped convicts," she went on, "we've been at such a lot of pains to get free, but the law has overtaken us, and you've got to give yourself up and go back and serve your time. And as soon as this unexpired year has expired, you'll be sentenced again, I feel it in my bones, and we'll never be free any more," she ended, with a vehement little laugh that skirted the precipice of a sob.

Brandon drew her down into a chair before the log fire that threw its light among the furthest shadows of the big book-lined room and set the whole place aglow.

"It needn't be quite so bad as that," he said, "we can manage to spend a lot of time here after all. I've been thinking over ways and means, as I came out this evening. And in Washington, we'll take a house by the park, and live to ourselves. A senator's job doesn't necessarily involve a lot of social activities, and I am determined you shall have the freedom from that sort of wear and tear that you have earned, after these four years in harness. And we shall have this place always to come back to, every chance we get or can make," he added, glancing around the big room and then down at the little woman who had breathed the breath of her own life into it.

Mathilde sprang to her feet and took her stand in front of him. Brandon knew by the tone of her voice that her mood had changed.

"He's a dear man to try so hard to find a way to let his wife eat her gingerbread and keep it too, but it can't be done, sir; it can't be done." She spoke with decision. "Of course it's a terrible uprootment, leaving this,"—the wave of her hand took in every nook and corner of the house, and beyond, the stretch of woodland that she loved. "But all the same my dear, we can't straddle the fence like that, have our heads in Washington and our hearts here; that would be too torturesome. We must transplant ourselves, body and soul; take root and grow a home that will be an oasis in that desert waste of stiff and stupid social functions.

"I used to watch the people there grinding their lives away at an endless treadmill, most of them shed-

ding every vestige of individuality in the process, and, even as a girl, I wondered why someone didn't try the effect of a few innovations in the midst of that sickening dead level of humdrumness and ostentatious pomp, where the ability to out-glitter one's neighbor seemed to be the extreme limit of one's ambition. Of course it would be appalling, disintegrating to one's self-respect, to keep step with that sort of a procession; we must set our own pace, 'gang our ain gait.' I have it," she said, her eyes kindling, "in the Senate you will represent the people of this state, and in our home we will represent *ourselves,* the things we stand for.

"And it will be fun, my dear, it will be fun." Her gaiety darted up out of her sober mood as the sun breaks through the clouds to make the rainbow. "For all our long service to the state we aren't quite ready for an old folks' home, and that's what we'd have made of this blessed place if Providence and the governor hadn't interfered," she ended, punctuating her remarks with frivolous little kisses on the end of the new senator's nose and the back of his head and the inside of his ears.

CHAPTER XX

WASHINGTON

MATHILDE'S genius for striking the right note, getting the right effect, was demonstrated in every detail of her Washington home, which became the rendezvous, especially on Saturday nights, for an interesting group of men and women of widely differing views, who yet had a spiritual kinship with each other.

As time went by, the Brandon "salon" grew to be a feature of the social and intellectual life of Washington, while Mathilde's dinners, simple as compared with the elaborate affairs that were the order of the day in ultra-exclusive circles, began to signify in people's minds something altogether distinctive and delightful.

There was no tangible passport to the informal "at homes" of the Brandons, the only line drawn being a more or less imaginary one. If you could fit into the general scheme of things you instinctively felt yourself in place and welcome, and if you failed to fit, sooner or later the impression was sure to be borne in on you that your best move would be a masterly retreat.

Among the people who helped to give character to these evenings, were the polished and brilliant French Ambassador and Amos Carmichael, who had seized upon this opportunity to build a permanent friendship on the foundations laid at Columbus, cabinet ministers, legislators, labor leaders, scientists, as well as

some of the leading diplomats, who, as one of them put it, "dropped in occasionally to sharpen his wits, pick up the thread of the world's thinking, and give the best that was in him a much needed outing."

A familiar figure during the first years of the Brandons' stay in Washington, and until he went to Cleveland as head of a hospital, was Charleston Bryce, who ran over from Baltimore for occasional week-ends. Grave and silent for the most part in the company of strangers, there was a fine restraint about the man which one was more apt to feel than to understand, a sense not so much of withdrawal from, as of mastery over, life's tumult.

Mathilde's personality undoubtedly gave the finishing touch to these gatherings. One felt her presence in a certain elusive spirit, a sympathetic quality that permeated the atmosphere, as the fragrance of flowers permeates a garden. It was largely due to a hospitality of soul in her, an instinctive kinship she felt for men and women of ideals, that made so many different types of people feel at home with each other under her roof; in short, that made it possible, amid the luxurious appointments of a home on the Avenue of the Presidents, for the spirit of Bohemia to hold such complete sway.

"My dear," the wife of one of the Supreme Court Justices said to Mathilde one night on leaving, "my husband and I agree that you have given us one of the pleasantest evenings we have had since those halcyon honeymoon days when we knocked about Europe, impecunious and unknown, and tasted the real joys of Bohemia."

"I didn't know there was a corner of it so close at hand," the justice interposed. "May we come often

to renew our youth and our spirits? And by the way, such music! Do you often serve music like that the young Russian gave us? It quite went to my head!"

"Let me tell you about him, and then present him to you," Mathilde replied, taking advantage of the opening Justice Baldwin's words offered, to find such a powerful friend for her protégé, for the musicales of the genial justice were among the choicest entertainments in Washington.

"I ran across him through one of my socialist friends and was interested at first because of the persecutions that had driven him to this country, and later, because of the musical genius we discovered underneath his nihilistic proclivities. It seems his music and his passion for freedom are all that Russian tyranny has left him.

"Ah, here's Mr. Benson now—the original discoverer of Zarawarski," she added, smiling at a gaunt young congressman who stood awkwardly by, waiting for a chance to take his leave. "I do want you two men to meet under my roof and see that neither one is as black as the other imagines," she laughed, her ready wit and tact saving a situation that might have proved too much for the equilibrium of the fiery young congressman, when he learned the man talking with his hostess was the justice whose decision in a certain corporation case he had denounced in thundering tones only the week before on the floor of the house.

As the two men shook hands Justice Baldwin remarked, in a tone of easy cordiality, that he hoped Mr. Benson would find it agreeable to come and hear Zarawarski play at his home, in the near future, if he could secure him for a *musicale*.

"Music is good neutral ground to meet on," the

young congressman flashed back, to Mathilde's relief and delight. "I shall be glad to come."

"Justice Baldwin is a dear, if he is a plutocrat," Mathilde confided to Brandon that night, when she told him of the incident.

As he flecked the ashes from his cigar, the senator observed, "Zarawarski of Russia, Tom Benson of Kansas, and Justice Baldwin of the Supreme Court! One hardly knows, my dear, whether to call your salon a melting-pot or a menagerie!"

CHAPTER XXI

SEVEN YEARS LATER

ONE April evening towards the end of Brandon's first full term as senator, he and Mathilde were seated in the library, she busy writing notes and he puffing away at his pipe in unaccustomed idleness and ease. Presently the butler appeared and announced, "The French Ambassador."

Mathilde rose from her desk. "Come to offer his country's congratulations on David's victory this afternoon, *n'est-ce pas?*" she laughed as she held out her hand in greeting. "He is feeling as jubilant as though one of his bills had passed. Golf tournaments are the breath of his nostrils these days; I'm quite sure he'd rather have his name on that cup than in the Hall of Fame," she added, as the senator proudly exhibited his trophy, and the ambassador gave vent to an almost boyish delight over his friend's prowess.

"Hospitality and the state of the thermometer prompt me to invite you to draw away from the fire to-night," Brandon said, indicating a chair on the far side of the room. "My wife insists on a log fire, for the sake of the picturesque, whenever the weather offers the slightest excuse—sometimes when it offers none," he added feelingly.

"I hope your Excellency doesn't think it too warm for a fire this evening," Mathilde appealed.

That finished diplomat made haste to reassure her.

"Not having engaged in any violent contest with my fellowmen this afternoon, my blood is not overheated, and I am properly appreciative of the good cheer of your fire. I never could understand," he added, seating himself at a safe distance from the fireplace and lighting a cigar, "how a man of the senator's high ideals could be so keen about always getting the best of the other fellow. Now here am I with my sordid theories and my more humane practises. I never was guilty of beating anyone at anything in my life. What is your defence?" he challenged the senator.

"I fear that I fall as far below my ideals in practise as you rise above yours," the senator agreed.

"Your salon last Saturday was such a brilliant success," Monod said, turning to Mathilde, "that I felt lost in the crowd, so I am breaking in on your solitude to-night by way of revenge. I am in desperate need of an antidote—I have just made my escape from one of Mrs. Leadstrom's dinners."

Brandon shrugged his shoulders sympathetically.

"Not all the champagne in La Marne can lighten the heaviness of those incomparable feasts of hers," the ambassador sighed. "I have often wished I might retire from the amiable platitudes of my hostess to the lower regions and hold converse with her *chef*. From the artistic quality of his productions, I like to flatter myself we are affinities, and I suspect we are compatriots."

"A man who can season terrapin as he does," Brandon agreed, "and end the dinner in a blaze of glory with *café parfait* that does not belie its name, and pyramids of plum-pudding that remind one of the seven hills of Rome on fire, must be a Frenchman as well as a genius."

"Mrs. Leadstrom's dinners have been landmarks in Washington for three generations," Mathilde laughed. "She prides herself on not changing with the times. She scorns the modern idea of laying the burden of responsibility on the butler, in the interest of ease and simplicity, and believes in making her guests earn their dinners by the sweat of their brows. I remember one of her dinners years ago when poor little Baroness de Blumenthal, the bride of the Russian Ambassador, was the guest of honor. She had run the gauntlet of innumerable courses and plunged the proper weapon into each startling combination, to everybody's secret sympathy and relief, but when she saw that plum-pudding coming towards her in its chariot of fire, she went perfectly white with fear. Justice Winston whispered to me that she looked like Iphigenia about to be offered on the altar of Mrs. Leadstrom's pride of plum-puddings."

"Having presided at the fiery ordeal so often, she has come to take a Nero-like satisfaction in the discomfiture of her guests," observed the senator. "She told me once that her puddings 'made conversation.' "

"They are the talk of her guests the next day," Mathilde laughed, "and make most of them talk in their sleep that night! But as for stimulating conversation during the dinner her appalling dishes always have the opposite effect on me. I'm so fearful that I'll draw down the whole towering structure of mousse into my lap, and so busy wondering which side of a pyramid of pate-de-foie gras to scale, or trying to figure out in advance the line of least resistance offered by the birds in their aspic cages, that I am utterly incapacitated for carrying on a connected conversation. Justice Winston, who sat next me the night of the

Russian dinner, said he felt the same. So we spent most of our time discussing ways and means of getting at the food, and had no end of fun. He made a reckless wager that I couldn't work the proper combination on the asparagus-fork, and when I manipulated it triumphantly and landed three large stalks intact on my plate, he sent me that sketch of Whistler's the next day, as a slight token of his respect and admiration for my prowess!"

As neither of the men showed any disposition to break in on her monologue, Mathilde continued:

"The Admiral of the Navy went through the dinner that night with a noble disregard for the exigencies of the occasion and a determination not to be sidetracked by any culinary interruptions. He ate all the courses from the oyster cocktails to the savory with his ice-cream fork, which the butler kept removing and bringing back disdainfully. All during dinner, the Admiral argued with the Speaker of the House, opposite him, about the need for a big navy, paying no more attention to the woman he took in than if she had been a shadow, and imperiously jerking his finger in the direction of his plate as each course arrived, to signify that the butler was to land it, that his only business was to eat it. Justice Winston said such independence made him green with envy; that he wished he had the strength of character or was enough of a celebrity to take such a stand. The old Admiral certainly got the best of the argument with the Speaker, but of course the Speaker was handicapped by having to keep his mind so constantly on the food supply."

"Those dinners are a nightmare, literally and figuratively, both before and after taking," the Senator summed up. "Remember, my dear, I always have a

previous engagement in the event of an invitation to Mrs. Leadstrom's. One of her dinners is an experience, I admit, but a little of that sort of experience goes a long way."

"What a farce this social life is! with its vanities, inanities and insanities," Monod groaned. "But to change the subject, the newspapers are full of the railroads, these days. What does all this agitation signify? What is the problem and is there a solution?"

Mathilde drew out her knitting ostentatiously. "I wonder how many socks I can do while David answers that question!"

"I only trust it has opened wide the floodgates," Monod protested. "I am hoping to be fairly inundated with information."

"I am glad you admit in advance you have brought the deluge on yourself," Brandon replied as he lit a cigar and prepared to plunge into his subject. "Josh Billings says: 'You can't have an honest horse race until you have an honest human race.' We can't expect a perfect railroad system in America until the American people are perfect.

"The question is, Does our present railroad management measure up to the intelligence and character of our people? No one, I think, would claim that it does. In fact it is generally admitted that our standards of corporation morality and honor are conspicuously lower than our personal standards. 'Sinning by syndicate' does not seem to be recognized in polite society as one of the seven deadly sins."

"Possibly because mankind has been developing personal morality for thousands of years and corporation morality for a comparatively few generations," Monod suggested. "But how about governmental activities in

this country? Isn't there plenty of graft in connection with them?"

"Where there is," Brandon replied, "usually it is an overflow or seepage from the corruption of the business world, business men having taken the initiative and involved government officials in crooked schemes, or used their influence to land crooked men in important posts. I would be more impressed by the arguments against government operation, if private railway management had shown less corruption than has the post office department for example, or our other governmental business activities. No Federal administration could possibly survive a record half as black as the record of some of our railroads.

"As a result of flagrant mismanagement, and worse, during the past twenty-five years, between forty and fifty per cent of our roads at one time or another have been thrown into the hands of receivers. Moreover during the last decade the physical condition of our railroads has deteriorated so alarmingly that in case of a panic, a war, or some other national crisis, their quasi-collapsed condition might prove our undoing."

"Nearly every nation in Europe," said Monod, "has experienced similar difficulties, tried all sorts of experiments and finally been driven to adopt a policy of partial or complete nationalization. In practically every instance this has proved far more satisfactory on the whole than private management, but America is a big country and the difficulties involved in such a change would be great."

"For many reasons," said Brandon, "I am loath to concede the final failure of private operation in this country, and still hope we can find some satisfactory form of regulation. I am planning to go abroad this

summer in order to get first hand information on European railroad conditions past and present."

"How splendid!" exclaimed the ambassador, "I am sailing myself in July. I shall make it my first business to bring you and Paul Marillier together. He has played a leading rôle in our railroad reorganization, and is a member of the Academy as well as one of our foremost economists.

"We went through the Lycée and the Sorbonne together, and were such inseparables we were nicknamed Damon and Pythias. After the university our paths parted. Marillier went in for economics, social reform, ethics, anything that would shed light on the problems of the Republic that he has always loved with a passionate reverence; I went in for diplomacy. Both our paths have led to their logical conclusions. I am a highly ornamental member of the diplomatic corps, serving my country to the best of my ability by eating Mrs. Leadstrom's dinners, while Marillier is one of the builders and makers of the France of the future, one of the men who is breathing into her the breath of new life."

Monod tossed his cigar into the fire, and began pacing up and down the room. "His last letter set my pulses bounding. A man who has held on to his dream as he has, never lost it in the garish light of day, but worked for it and sacrificed for it until at last he sees it coming true before his very eyes: mon Dieu! that man has lived."

"Has he ever been to America?" Mathilde asked.

"No, but he writes he may give a few lectures at Harvard and Columbia next year. He is keen to see Washington, to study American ideas here at the fountain-head. He imagines I have my hand on the

pulse of this Republic, that I am attuned to its every heartbeat. He has always idealized me, persists still in believing that I am a spiritual representative of the France he loves!"

Monod's emotions were gaining on him and he checked himself, continuing in another tone, as he prepared to take his leave, "I know you will be kindred spirits. A decade ago his ideas were considered revolutionary, dangerous, but things have begun to shape his way; out of the dozens of old parties that have made French politics a nightmare and a chaos the past quarter of a century, a new alignment is evolving—of radicals, progressives and retrogressives—those who demand the millennium overnight, those who stand for orderly progress, and those who oppose all progress. It is much the same alignment everywhere; there will be good fighting ahead for Marillier and his kind."

The ambassador paused. Something in the tone of his voice, even more than in what he said, made a swift appeal to Mathilde's sympathy. She caught the unspoken regret that lay beneath his words, the fine shade of bitterness that tinged his spirit. With her sure powers of intuition, the gift she had of feeling her way where she could not even dimly see, she knew instinctively what Monod did not know himself, that he had not grown so far away from Marillier as he thought; that he could still meet him on his own high ground; that intellectually at least his whole life until now had been making him ready to do for France what neither he nor the time had been ripe for him to do before. It was only a question of his spirit, she said to herself. Had that, indeed, been dulled, or had it been growing too, silently, mysteriously, underneath all this outward show of careless gaiety?

She recalled how once when she had spoken to him of her own religious faith, of how it entered into all her living and was at the root of all her hopes for mankind, he had said quietly: "One might come to great conclusions; one might be inspired by such an ideal to great ends."

So she met his mood with a quick challenge to what she felt was in the man.

"They are making history in your country now. Why don't you go back, join hands with Marillier, and help work out a program to which you could give your whole-hearted allegiance? Will it not come to that if once you can believe that France has need of you?"

CHAPTER XXII

WHILE ROME BURNS

LITTLE did the Ambassador and the Brandons suspect that tranquil April evening as they planned the summer in Europe, that even then the war clouds were gathering and that the destinies of mankind were soon to be fought out on the soil of France.

During the next three tragic years Washington became the storm center where, more than any other place in America, one could catch the throb and thrill of what was passing at the front. With every fiber of her being protesting against the crime and stupidity of war, Mathilde plunged into Red Cross work, finding in it an outlet for her passionate pity for the victims of the war, and her impatience at America's delay in helping put an end to it. She cut out all social activities except official war dinners and entertainments for the allied missions, where she and Brandon, who was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, were in constant demand, their knowledge of foreign languages and cosmopolitan point of view playing a patriotic part in helping bridge the gulf that separated America, psychologically at least, from her allies.

The third winter of the war, the palatial home of Peter Seward-Pell, owner of a munitions factory, was opened with a ball that dazzled even the most blasé by its splendor. The fact that for three years Europe had been plunged in a welter of blood, that any day America

might be swept into the vortex, had no power to disturb the sublime self-centeredness of Mrs. Seward-Pell or to distract her mind from the immediate business in hand, which was to celebrate with fitting pomp the entrance of her only daughter into society.

Special cars brought guests from New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, while the cotillion favors, costly trinkets of gold and silver were among the much advertised features of the entertainment. A famous prima donna from the Metropolitan Opera House, and one of the world's leading tenors had been engaged to sing at a musicale before the ball, and thousands of dollars' worth of rare flowers and tropical plants turned the ball room and banquet hall, indeed the whole house, into a scene of barbaric splendor, where gorgeously gowned women and men, whose fortunes represented hundreds of millions of dollars, fitted in as integral parts of the picture.

It came over Mathilde, with a quickened sense of revolt, the immense folly, the utter brutality of this scene, against the background of a world at war. As she thought of the starving millions of Europe, of the bones of little children whitening the roads of Poland, of France and England bled white, fighting with their backs to the wall, while the fate of civilization hung in the balance, this mad orgy seemed like a fantastic repetition of Nero fiddling with Rome on fire.

Was there any hope, she said to herself, of bridging the gulf that stretched between these callous wastrels, and those agonizing millions overseas? Almost, it seemed to her, these rich ones, starving in the midst of their plenty, were the most to be pitied, after all! If only, she thought, they could have a vision of how worse than useless the struggle must prove that is not

for the high things; of how hollow the life must ring at last that has been empty of God! And even before the final accounts are settled, she said to herself, how surely they begin to pay, these people who have put from them the highest! One could see the emptiness of their souls reflected in their faces, catch in their feverish chatter the echo of the sounding brass they had made of what God meant to be the music of their lives. Poor defrauded souls, with everything in their reach and nothing, worse than nothing, in their grasp! What had their leisure done for them but rob them of the value of their time, and their wealth, but impoverish them, and their freedom but make them slaves? What did success mean to them but a vast defeat in living!

As she wandered through the rooms with Brandon, noting the different faces, everywhere she was struck with the lack of noble calm. Passing a group of young girls, she shuddered; were they also to take that look on their faces, and be branded with the same mark? But the face which haunted her was that of Mrs. Farwell, of the Pacific Coast, upon whose private life the fierce light of publicity had beat relentlessly, revealing all the details of her "affair" with a man almost young enough to be her son, her sensational divorce, her subsequent marriage with her lover, and their establishment in a house in Washington, where, in spite of their fabulous wealth, their progress along the social highway had been slow and painful.

The strain of the long siege showed plainly in Mrs. Farwell's face and in her eyes was a look as though she were tortured always with the memory of what she had lost. The thought of her young son must surely have gone into the making of that look, as well as that other thing she had lost, which no money can ever

buy back, which no woman by searching may ever find again. Truly the iron had entered into her soul, Mathilde felt, as she watched the mechanical smile on her lips that her sad eyes belied.

Instinctively Mathilde contrasted the face of Mrs. Farwell with that of Mrs. Crewe standing not far from her. She knew Mrs. Crewe's history; everyone in Washington knew it; some even balked at it, though her escapades had been so numerous that people had wearied of discussing them. Moreover the death of her husband and the marriage of her children had left her freer than Mrs. Farwell, so the verdict ran, to go her chosen way.

Mathilde's heart registered an indignant protest against the injustice and hypocrisy involved in the attitude of a capricious society toward these two women. Mrs. Farwell, tortured in her own soul, impressed Mathilde as a woman who had suffered and could learn, while Mrs. Crewe, bold and self-assured, gave her the feeling of one too calloused to suffer, too complacent to care to learn.

With a sudden impulse to turn the passion of her pity into some word, some look that might help, Mathilde crossed to where Mrs. Farwell stood, and spoke to her gently, taking her hand for an instant, meeting the eager look of the woman with a look as eager, that seemed to search out and find her soul and touch it for an instant with light. After Mathilde had passed, Mrs. Farwell drew a sigh like a restless child that has felt some soothing touch, but when she tried to remember what had been said, she could recall no word that either one had spoken; only she was quite sure she had not asked Mathilde to call. She could never hope now to have that woman for a friend, and

before, she would not have cared for her friendship! That was the bitter irony of it; through her very guilt, her eyes were opened to spiritual beauties and values which she had flung away, to a vision which might never have come to her, if it had not been for her sin.

As she stood in the midst of that gay company, there flashed into her mind one of Ruskin's phrases she had learned as a girl, a phrase which summed up the vast difference between a life like hers and a life like Mathilde's. "Wife means weaver; you must either be house wives or house moths. In the deep sense you must either weave men's fortunes and embroider them, or feed upon them and bring them to decay." Looking back over the waste places of her life, the scorched and blackened wilderness over which the fire of her passion had raged, her heart cried out, if only in the beginning it had all been different! if only she could have seen clearly then, when the road lay straight before her and the skies were clear, what might she not have made of life.

The glare of light, the close atmosphere of the heavily scented rooms stifled Mathilde. As soon as possible she and Brandon made their escape. On the landing they met Senator Gardner, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. He drew Brandon aside: "There is a rumor unconfirmed of another ship, probably American, sunk by a submarine. We'll know before morning. We can't skirt this precipice much longer, we'll be over the brink soon." The words were scarcely spoken when the German Ambassador passed down the stair-way, looking straight ahead of him.

"The sooner the better," Brandon replied grimly, his eyes fixed on the retreating figure. As the Brandons pushed their way through the crowds of newly arriving

guests, past the lines of scarlet-coated flunkies to their car, the cry "Extra! Extra!" rang out shrill and clear in the night air, "Ship sunk—lives lost——"; one could just catch the words above the roar of automobiles and the sounds of revelry within. There was a rush for the newsboy; footmen, guests and passers-by elbowed each other out of the way or shared each other's papers, reading the flaring headlines by the glare of the powerful spotlights.

As Mathilde waited breathlessly for Brandon to come back with a paper, she noticed a woman across the street, her figure outlined for a moment by the light from a limousine that had just driven up. Something about the woman haunted Mathilde, obsessed her with a feeling that she must follow her, speak to her, save her, from some desperate deed. She tried to shake off this feeling. The passion that was gripping the capitol this mad night had unnerved her, she said to herself, made her the prey of foolish impulses; there were so many of these poor creatures, one could not be following them all. So she settled back in the cushions and tried to forget, while Brandon read aloud the scant but portentous details from the extra. Presently she sat up, put out her hand, "I can't help it, David. I must follow that woman. We'll just look a little, if she has turned away, I'll be satisfied, only I can't go home till I have at least tried to find her." Brandon hesitated a moment started to speak, then gave the order to turn back and drive slowly.

In a few moments Mathilde caught sight of a figure hurrying toward the bridge. "David," she said excitedly, "you must get out and leave me, I must overtake that girl, speak to her alone. Do you mind very

much? I am so sorry, so afraid, but I can't help this that is driving me."

Brandon spoke again to the chauffeur. "Mrs. Brandon wants to overtake a woman ahead, do you understand?" he said in a strained voice. "Stop and let me out, then do as she says." Mathilde was having to fight herself for courage and she was grateful she did not have to argue with her husband. "No one ever understood my deepest down self but you," she whispered, as he shut the door and lifted his hat.

Alone and close upon the woman, Mathilde began to tremble, terrified at the strangeness of what she was doing. The woman had stopped, was leaning over the bridge, her back turned from the street. As the car drew up to the sidewalk, Mathilde opened the door and said in a voice she hardly recognized for its tremor and faintness, "You are tired, won't you get in with me? I am quite alone." The girl started violently, turned a young face full of terror, that told her tragic story, and Mathilde added in an eager voice, "Now I have found you, you must come home with me." She helped the trembling creature to the seat beside her, and drawing the fur robe over her gently, said, "You must rest now, we shall have plenty of time later to talk."

As they drove through the street, the mute figure at her side became to Mathilde's excited imagination the symbol of France, of Belgium, of Serbia, while her own impulsive act,—of a sudden stripped of all its strangeness,—seemed merely the symbol of what America to-night was on the brink of doing—going to the rescue, Heaven be praised, going at last to the rescue, of humanity, outraged, done to death, at its last gasp!

Arrived at the house, she led the way to a quiet

bedroom, brought in a dressing gown and soft padded slippers, lit the wood fire and turned out the light. Her evening coat was thrown back, showing the arch of her neck, the snowy whiteness of her shoulders. There was a suffused radiance about her that made her seem to the eyes of the tired girl like some bright angel who could not belong to this blackened earth. Taking her hands for an instant, Mathilde whispered "Good-night, God keep you both."

When she joined her husband the tears she had been keeping back came to the relief of her strained nerves and excited brain. "Oh! she sobbed, hiding her head on his shoulder, "Why couldn't the joy have come to me, and that poor girl have been spared the shame!"

The last thing before she slept, there stirred in her mind a phantom thought, the shadow as it were of some subconscious feeling tossed for an instant to the surface from the depths of her hid desire. "Who knows?" she asked herself softly, stilling the longing the sight of the girl had waked in her, "Who knows if these years of waiting be not years of grace for me?"

CHAPTER XXIII

HEART'S DESIRE

SHORTLY after the Seward-Pell ball, the great moment arrived for which millions of hearts had been waiting in an agony of hope and fear. At last America threw the weight of her treasure and her blood into the scales of war.

Except for a flying trip to Wildwood to turn it over to the Red Cross for a hospital, Mathilde did not leave Washington that tense, breathless summer.

The success of an impromptu little dinner in the dining car to a dozen doughboys she met on her return trip from Wildwood, gave her the clue to the particular kind of war work for which she was best fitted. Later, one floor of her house was turned over to the soldiers, —a billiard room, writing-room and lounge,—where she was "at home" to them two or three afternoons in the week, with all the spontaneity and unconscious charm which had made her one of the most sought after hostesses in Washington.

It was this personal contact with the soldiers that gripped her most of all. They made an appeal to which her heart was forever responding, that stream of young men pouring through the camps, setting out on their great adventure, the greatest adventure of all time. She seldom saw the same men twice; most of them came once and were gone, swallowed up in the wave that bore them on their far journey to France.

But to those who came in touch with her if only for a few moments' gay banter over the tea cups, she seemed to give something that had in it, the lifting power of Life. No one knew how she managed it, least of all the men themselves, many of whom were only dimly conscious of something stirring in the depths of them that had not stirred till she called, or rather till Life called through her, and through the great experience by which their souls were passing.

Always since her marriage, Mathilde had had a feeling that amounted to a certainty, that some day she would have a child, a son. So she had waited, with a confidence born of a passionate faith, that this longing was somehow, sometime, to be realized, that it was not in the nature of God, of destiny, to deny her this boon. And at last her faith was rewarded, for close upon the signing of the armistice, came the knowledge that she was to have her heart's desire.

Her first exultant burst of joy was succeeded by a deep quietness that enveloped her, body and soul, a quietness invaded, however, by strange forebodings that hurled themselves into the midst of her most serene days, flashing in and out of her consciousness, swift and terrible, leaving always their impress on her emotional nature, hypersensitive at this time, to register every passing thought.

She used to ask herself desperately, if other women embarked on this way, which was to be the way of life for some other soul, feeling themselves borne irresistibly on towards the inevitable struggle, were overwhelmed as she was, with the mystery closing in about them—haunted with the daily wonder as to what the end would be. Often the slightest incident would precipitate a sudden reign of terror, when for a time she

was completely at the mercy of a wild unreasoning fear that she might not live to see her son.

One day at a luncheon she overheard some women discussing the question as to which should be sacrificed, the mother or the child, if only one could be saved. A graduate nurse from Johns Hopkins summed up the matter, voicing the orthodox view. "Of course, if there is a question, the child must be sacrificed; there is no other way."

Mathilde's blood ran cold, if it were a question, *was* there no other way? Ah, if it should be a question, there *must* be some other way! The words kept ringing in her ears, as she drove home. If only she could tell her husband her foolish fears! But something held her back. That was the one thing she could not tell him,—the thing she wanted most to tell! Instead, she must go on talking confidently of the future, building innumerable castles in the air for three.

That night at dinner she talked feverishly of the day's doings, retailing the latest gossip for Brandon, trying to crowd out the memory of those haunting words: "Pauline Whitman was at the lunch, cocksure and aggressive as ever, breathing out controversy, contempt and anathema as naturally as a flower breathes out fragrance. It's uncanny, the intensity of that woman's partisanship, her hatred of the opposition.

"When she gets started on the League of Nations, echoing her father's attacks, insisting on America's flinging her ideals to the winds and ignoring, 'in this its day, the things that belong unto its peace',—the things that belong to the peace of the world—, my blood runs cold. How any human being, capable of clear thinking, could be influenced by her specious arguments, to line up against the one workable and working plan so

far proposed, to promote and safeguard world peace, is beyond belief. But the poison is spreading; I could see it taking effect in the faces of some of those women.

"Why in the name of all that they are supposed to stand for, do not the mothers of the world get together and launch a Woman's Crusade to rescue, not the Holy Sepulchre where Christ's body lay, but the very spirit of the Prince of Peace!"

In an abandon of feeling Mathilde's arms, outflung, made the sign of the Cross. "If only I could be of some use, do something——." She sank into her chair covering her face with her hands. Brandon bent over her.

"That's not your job just now, little wife. Heaven has another piece of business up its sleeve for you. But never fear, you will have your chance later, to fight for peace. It will be a long fight, I'm thinking, and one that in the end, like that for temperance, the women will have to win. This is just the beginning of the struggle. Whitman's personal hatred of the President has given him the diabolical inspiration to drag into partisan politics the League of Nations, which he was eloquently championing a few months ago, to confuse it in the popular mind with the idea of entangling alliances, tie it up with the personality of the President, and then train the guns on him, and assassinate him, no matter if it costs a nationwide campaign of lies, and jeopardizes the peace of the world.

"Dante, in picking a hero for the lowest round of his Inferno, could scarcely have bettered that, for pure, unadulterated Hate. This policy of Whitman's which he is trying to foist on his party against the conscience of the best men in it, will lead, if he succeeds, to its logical conclusion. In order to prove

themselves consistent, they will be forced to fight any proposition from any quarter that even squints in the direction of America's recognition of her international obligations and responsibilities. A cold-blooded proposition like that, to prostitute the peace of the world to partisan politics, bid a nation lose its soul in order to win an election, is,—well, I should say, it is Whitman at his best—or at his worst!

"And after Pauline had done with the League, what was her next line of attack?" Brandon asked, switching the conversation on to less exciting topics.

"The shortcomings of the administration in general and in particular, the Federal management of the railroads, which she gave us to understand had been the last word in bungling and inefficiency."

Brandon smiled indulgently. "Did she carry her audience with her or did Providence deliver them into your hands?"

"While I was choking down my wrath with my salad and wondering whether I could afford to get all stirred up by locking horns with her, that delightful Mrs. Lloyd of Philadelphia, who did such superb war work in France, and has been such a toast here this spring, jumped into the arena. She said she didn't care to invoke the right of eminent domain and run a railroad, so to speak, through the conversational field, but that in the interests of fair play, attention should be called to the fact that a few months after our entrance into the war, private management had completely collapsed, so that the Government was forced, purely as a temporary war expedient, and quite against its wishes, to create overnight a national railroad transportation system. Considering the unparalleled difficulties that had to be surmounted, the suc-

cess of this system, she said, was one of our outstanding war achievements.

"Pauline is so accustomed to being surrounded by admiring and acquiescent members of her own set who swallow her statements whole, undigested and undisputed, that she hasn't had much chance to develop her argumentative muscles; so she doesn't put up a very strong defense when hard pressed.

"She lost her head at this unexpected turning of the tables and indulged in a vicious fling at the President by way of ending the argument. For a moment I thought Mrs. Lloyd had decided to ignore the remark. When she spoke, there wasn't a vestige of anger or personal feeling and she didn't even seem to be answering Pauline. It was as though she were voicing the compassion we all felt for his tragic fate, and our pride in his surpassing record. It was almost trite, she said, to refer to the President as a 'wounded soldier,' but after her experience with our men overseas, the glimpse she had into the heart of what they were fighting for, all it cost in human anguish, all it meant for the hope of mankind—those words gave her a vivid sense of the greatness of his service and lifted it on to a plane where for the moment at least, we forgot the tragedy of the suffering, and remembered only the glory of the sacrifice.

"By way of letting down the tension, she added laughingly, that while she did not belong to the President's political party, and by no means subscribed to all his policies, she was glad to be among those who recognized his greatness now, instead of having to wait for her children's children to teach her his place in history!

"If political debates are to be the order of the day

at lunches and teas I shall have to prepare for hand to hand combats with Pauline, especially after Mrs. Lloyd goes back to Philadelphia and you let drop your bomb of a railroad bill! What is the Whitman-Braxton game now? Are they going to have a railroad bill of their own or will they be content with killing yours?"

"They have a life-sized high finance bill up their sleeve," Brandon replied, "which they intend to spring at the psychological moment. I don't know the exact details yet, but I think it is safe to prophesy that the treasury raid they are planning will be as gigantic as is the barrage of bunk with which they have begun their big offensive. You see what we're up against, what a fight is on," he added, looking at his watch. "I have an engagement with Fullerton at nine to talk over our bill. We've about decided not to bring it up before the last of the session, but there's a lot of work ahead, in getting it well before the country and getting the country well behind it. We'll need a good five months yet!"

"Five months!" It flashed over Mathilde that was just her time. The two were being prepared together, then, the bill and the child! And what if her husband should not be with her! If she should die—if they should take him from her and let her die—alone! without him!

The idea took instant possession of her. She tried to shake it off, despised herself for being such an easy prey to panic; to this torture of being always keyed up, ready to respond to the slightest passing touch of foolish fear. There were tears in her eyes as he bent over to kiss her good-bye.

"Why, darling, what is it?" She put her arms round his neck and burst into a passion of weeping.

"Don't go; stay with me," she pleaded. "Don't ever leave me. Let the bill go! Promise you will never leave me! I am so afraid without you!"

Amazed and alarmed at this extraordinary outburst, and filled with a tenderness born of the mystery and wonder of what was passing in her soul, Brandon rang the bell, wrote out a message for Fullerton, postponing the conference until the next morning, and came back to Mathilde, all devotion, all eagerness to soothe and comfort her.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOOKING BACKWARD

BRANDON threw a log on the fire, turned the lights low and, piling the pillows about her, sat down taking both her hands in his,—giving himself up to the joy of being alone with her. It was unutterably sweet, the way she depended on him, leaned on him, with the whole weight of her body and soul!

"It's such a luxury to go all to pieces sometimes and let you gather up the fragments, put me safely together again," she murmured presently. "I feel quite safe now. No harm can come with you to stand guard over us!"

She heaved a deep sigh of contentment. "We haven't had an evening like this to ourselves for ages. It makes me feel wicked to be stealing you away from everybody and everything. But stolen sweets *are* good!" She gave his hand an ecstatic little squeeze.

"That New England forefather of yours didn't succeed in leavening the lump of frivolity deposited in you by a long line of Virginia cavaliers, who had a pagan relish for stolen sweets that would have turned bitter on his Puritan palate."

"Do you remember the deliciousness of that summer we spent in Belhaven?" she demanded, the mention of her Pilgrim ancestor calling up the memory of the New England seacoast village where she and Brandon

had escaped for their belated honeymoon, the summer after his election.

"This evening alone together makes me think of those stretches of days and nights all to ourselves," she added dreamily. "Can't you shut your eyes and see the little white cottage with the green shutters, at the fork of the village road, on the edge of Ocean Hill, where the grandees resorted? And the little protecting hedge in front, and the clumps of Christmas trees that sheltered us from view, and the ragged back-yard that ran up and down hill and lost itself in the woods? And do you 'mind' how we used to lie in the hammock and watch the world go by in its autos, or sail by in its yachts, with never a glance our way, nor a suspicion that we were charming, or rich,—or governors?"

"That was a clever scheme of yours, having the titles trimmed off the letters before they were forwarded. It saved our lives."

"And that cottage was my idea too," Mathilde claimed; "you would have taken one of those horrors on the hill. From the first glimpse I caught of the 'Bee Hive' I loved it, and saw what I could make of it; I always did say I'd have accomplished wonders if I'd been born poor, or even had married a poor man, but I've never had any chance.

"And wasn't it splendid," she babbled on, "fraternizing with those fisher-folk?

"Do you remember the morning Aunt Thankful dropped in to tell us about the annual church fair,—how she looked down at the frayed edges of that Chikara rug in the living room, and suggested, as some of our carpets were wearing out, we might want to buy the one the Sewing Circle had just finished, that was real cheerful and gay?

"You rose superbly to the occasion, and agreed it *was* time we were buying another carpet, as that one was getting rather old. I wonder what she would have said if you had told her its age—and its price!

"And Aunt Ursula, with her curls bobbing about her face—always busy and breathless over her baking and dusting, till she broke her hip and had to get a 'girl.' The first of the series turned out to be 'going on seventy' and stone-deaf. By the end of the summer poor Aunt 'Ursy' had had almost as many vicissitudes and 'virgin companions' as little St. Ursula with her martyred ten thousand."

"And Uncle Ezra," Brandon took up the tale. "His eyes were set, and his words came slowly after his 'stroke,' but he always managed to say what he started out to say, if you had time to wait. His balanced phrases, if they did not exactly come trippingly, at least came impressively, as became the speech of a ruling elder and janitor."

"He ruled with a high hand," Mathilde interposed, as if chanting a response. "Do you remember how he refused to let that soprano from the hotel have a violin obligato for her 'Angel's Serenade,' and had the ungodly instrument put out of the church just before the service began?"

"And old Squire Peters," Brandon put in, "I wonder if his ambition has been realized yet! For forty years he'd had a hankering to pass the plate in church, but 'Ezra judged it wasn't best!' The fact that he wasn't a 'professor' barred him automatically."

"And Obadiah Osgood, the green-vegetable man."

The name struck some common chord of mirth in both their memories, and they burst into simultaneous laughter. "Can't you see Lord Eustis poking among

the vegetables in the wagon, trying to drive a bargain with Obadiah for four bunches of beets for a quarter! Little did Obadiah suspect that day, that he was locking horns with the heir to one of the biggest titles in England. . . ."

"And when we all exclaimed over the high price of fruit, and Eustis urged us not to go to the expense of raspberries on his account, Obadiah looked up sympathetically, and explained that 'the rich 'uns'—jerking his finger toward Ocean Hill—'had pushed prices up so in these parts, that it was getting so them of modest means couldn't afford to come to Belhaven much longer.'

"Then he threw in an extra bunch of beets to counteract the effect on us of his dismal prophecy," Brandon added with reminiscent relish.

"And while you and Obadiah were making change and Eustis was holding the market-basket, with me thumping melons in a thrifty way, and Mammy Lou beaming on us in the background, the Van Nortons dashed by and cast a superior glance at our humble little group, while Obadiah explained in an awestruck voice, they were 'swells—swimmin' in money.' "

Here Brandon took up the story. "Mammy Lou was the only one who didn't glory in the obscurity and approve of the incognito. How she did despise those Yankees from the bottom of her soul for not instinctively gravitating to you and worshiping at your shrine. Eustis certainly did revel in Mammy Lou. He said she was the strongest argument in favor of slavery he'd ever run across. I thought he would have apoplexy at that conversation he and I overheard between Mammy Lou and the Irish maid, who, after bragging about her mistress being such a handy person

around the house, asked if you helped with the dishes. If you'd been accused of murder, you couldn't have been more stoutly defended. She gave that girl to understand you were a 'lady,' and had never done a lick of work in your life, and 'none of your fo'bears neither'; that they were all 'as rich as creamus, way back as far as Moses!' It was only by a superhuman effort of the will that she kept from divulging the secret then and there, that you were the 'governess' of Ohio.

"When the Irish girl bristled up and said she guessed her mistress was a lady too, as good as anybody, that work didn't keep folks from being ladies, Mammy Lou's indignation died down in the face of such appalling ignorance, and she enlightened the girl with a forbearance that was sublime.

" 'Why, darlin', you doan mean no harm; you just doan understan'. Of course your mistress is a lady, and so are you a lady. All I was tryin' to explain is there's two kinds of ladies. Your mistress is a lady, but my madam is what you call a *refined lady.*' Having readjusted the social boundary lines according to the best light of the dark ages, with true diplomacy she switched the conversation on to less dangerous grounds, and urged on the mollified Bridget another cup of tea!

"Poor Eustis was so tired of being entertained and exploited by American hostesses, I'm glad we gave him that oasis of obscurity. But it was rather taking a chance, inviting him down to the Bee Hive——"

"Of course, if he hadn't been such a thoroughbred, the experience would have bored him and us terribly," Mathilde admitted, "but I knew his father well enough to risk the son as a guest."

"I'm glad you didn't decide to risk the son as a husband, on the strength of the father. The old Earl always did have a hankering for you as a daughter-in-law, didn't he?"

Mathilde laughed. "On that trip with us to the Yellowstone, he made all sorts of overtures, and later, when father and I visited him in England, he assured me he'd cable for his son to come back from India at once, if I'd have him."

"I'm glad he didn't cable."

"Well, I hope the dear old man has a daughter-in-law to his liking now," Mathilde responded, dismissing the subject; "I judge from that miniature Eustis showed us of his fiancée that she is just suited to the part. What an idea that was of his, to take the Bee Hive the next summer for his honeymoon, and duplicate ours! I daresay the Lady Constance would have objected roundly to such a proposition!"

Suddenly the clock in the hall that had belonged to Mathilde's Puritan ancestors struck eleven severe strokes.

"Time all descendants of the Pilgrim fathers were in bed," Brandon said, lifting Mathilde and half carrying her upstairs.

But even when she was safely tucked in bed, she clung to him. "You must sit here and hold my hand until I am fast asleep," she commanded; "until long after I am asleep. If you don't promise to stay, I'll keep awake and hold you—I like being a tyrant tonight," she added drowsily.

Brandon bent over her. "And for my reward, for allowing you to play the tyrant tonight, you are to let Mackenzie, who is coming to the White House next month, do your miniature, for me and Dave. He's

the best man in the world, they say— the only one worthy to do my wife. Is that a bargain?"

Mathilde started to protest. It was so tiresome to sit to an artist. . . . And Mackenzie's prices were wicked, positively wicked. . . . It was a sin to put all that money into one small miniature . . . with so many war widows and starving orphans.

But Brandon went on, a compelling note in his voice. "I want this miniature to keep for twenty-one years myself. When little Dave comes of age—better still, when he is twenty-five—he shall have it for his own."

Something in the idea struck Mathilde, also the intensity of Brandon's desire. There were so few things in the concrete he ever wanted!

"Tyrants can be very nice and obliging when they choose," she said. "You shall have your extravagant wish; anything you ask tonight, you and Dave shall have, even to the half of my kingdom—to the whole of it," she added softly; "one half for each of you"—and almost instantly she was asleep.

It was moonlight, and Brandon sat by her a long time, musing of the future, watching her face, which bore that mark of peculiar exaltation which sometimes came to her in sleep, when the body seemed to make way for the spirit, leaving it free for its communion. What thoughts were passing now, he wondered, in that radiant soul of hers? How little even he knew of its imprisoned splendor! There were deeps beyond the deeps he had fathomed, heights beyond heights, that he had never scaled!

He fell to musing on the child that was to be, soul of her soul, life of her life. A conversation he had had with her a few weeks before, coming home from a dinner at the White House, came back to him. He had

never seen her so beautiful as she looked that night and he told her so.

Leaning back, she had closed her eyes, putting out her hands to him. "This is positively my last appearance in public. Hereafter the time is all for my husband and my son."

It was curious, he thought, the way she always spoke of a son. There had never been a shadow of doubt in her mind. That night, it had seemed to him that only a woman could embody her spirit. He would have liked a daughter to grow up into her image, as she looked then. He had hinted this to her.

"No," she had answered; "we are to have no duplicates. Another me or another you, is not what is needed. It is that in you, which has drawn me to you, and that in me which has drawn you to me, your strength of intellect and my power of feeling, which are to be united in a new soul, that shall be and do what neither you nor I can be or do. That is one of the many things that I *feel* now, and you will *know* later. For a big wise man you are very foolish sometimes, and for a foolish little woman, I am sometimes very wise."

They had got out of the car, and let themselves into the house. She had gone ahead two steps up the stairway, and pausing on the landing, leaned down toward him, her evening cloak thrown back, a strange light in her eyes.

"The reason I see so much farther than you," she had said whimsically, putting her hands on his shoulders, "is because I am so much taller. You can take my word for it, Dave will be a man!"

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE CAPITOL

A WRANGLE over an appropriation asked for by the Federal railroad administration brought to a head the question of the future disposition of the roads, and opened the way for a spirited debate between Brandon and Senator Whitman, whose colossal fortune was tied up in railroad stocks and bonds. The discussion was in fact a preliminary skirmish, to try out the strength of the system, a first step toward lining up the men it controlled, or could influence, for the big battle soon to follow.

Early in the afternoon, Mathilde was in her place in the senate gallery, keen to hear her husband. Some routine business delayed matters interminably and as the time dragged on she grew restless and weary. As she listened to a hypocritical harangue by Senator Krupp, a man with the smoothest of tongues and the most questionable of records, the atmosphere of the place seemed of a sudden utterly sordid. Was it hopeless, after all, she asked herself, the struggle Brandon was making? Could the lump ever be leavened?

What impartial committee could have accepted such credentials as some of those senators had to offer? Goldberg, for instance, the copper king who was commonly believed to have secured his seat in the United States Senate by methods similar to those he had

employed years back, when in the immigrant quarter of one of our seacoast cities, he had bargained for second hand furniture.

What irony of fate had sent such a man to Washington, as a representative of the people! She thought of the subtle forces everywhere at work—treacherous undercurrents that sweep men, before they are aware, from the straight course they have intended to pursue, on and on to the sure shipwreck that awaits them. She glanced over at Kingman's powerful frame. A great leader he might have been, if he had not chosen to become spokesman for a financial autocracy, a man who did its bidding now, who once might have bade a nation follow him!

And Buffington! She knew something of the pressure that was being brought to bear on him; how would he steer his course? Would he be able to stem the current? What dramas of conflict and defeat forever were taking place on the senate floor! How often men were blinded to the real issues by the dust that was thrown in their faces, or by their training and traditions. And what of that other blindness, she asked herself, of those who were true to false ideals that they held to be right?

Old Senator Morehead of Tennessee, for example. No one could deny that in trying to check the tide of progressive ideas, he was guided by a high sense of duty. There was something superb about the spirit of the man, the protest of his whole being against the aggressions of "mob-rule," as he termed it. The people, he declared frankly, are not fit to rule; witness their folly in demanding the initiative and referendum, and the recall of judges—a seven-leagued stride in the direction of socialism and ruin. Stern and uncom-

promising representative of a generation that was passing, he would defend, if need be with his life, the people against themselves.

Mathilde thought of various methods that had been employed to defeat progressive legislation, to turn the tide at the critical moment, by cutting short debate, filibustering, smothering bills in committee, and assassinating them "in conference." But it was not all sordid; she looked round the senate. Big changes had come to pass in the last few years; bigger changes still were being foreshadowed! On both sides of the chamber were men who had broken away from party machines and were fighting inside their parties as well as out of them the conspiracy of reaction,—preparing the way for that new alignment of forward looking men which was the hope of the future.

In the midst of Senator Whitman's speech, a bevy of smartly dressed women, headed by Pauline Whitman, entered the members' gallery and took their places in front of Mathilde. Pauline Whitman, the only daughter of Senator Whitman, had persistently preferred the companionship of her father to marriage. She took an absorbing interest in politics and loathed with all the strength of a keen mind and all the intensity of which her cold nature was capable, the men who dared to oppose what her father stood for. It was chiefly owing to her initiative that attendance on senate debates, interspersed with gay little luncheons and teas in the senate café, had become a favorite Lenten diversion of the women of her set, who followed the discussion with intense interest or ill-concealed contempt, according to the point of view of the speaker. Any "regular" was sure to be greeted by a flutter of feminine approval and the rhythmic waving

of ostrich plumes, the nearest approach to applause the senate rules allowed, while expressive lifts of the eyebrows or shrugs of the shoulder were the unfailing response to whatever was said on the other side.

The sudden interest in the political situation of women of this type was not without significance, a straw which proved how fiercely the political winds were beginning to blow. The "social lobby" of late had become a recognized political power. In former years, it was considered more or less bad form to mingle with politicians; members of the Congress who on account of their wealth or affiliations were "received socially," as Mrs. Leadstrom would have put it, were accustomed to attend to their political duties quietly and unobtrusively, as part of their official life, which was kept separate and distinct from their social activities.

Rarely in those days did any vital issue arise to disturb the calm and even tenor of legislation in the interest of great corporations. But a change had come over Washington. The cry of Public Welfare vs. Privilege, raised by a few rebellious souls and echoed and re-echoed in the popular magazines, had been taken up by the country at large. Examples of political corruption were exposed to the public gaze; the stench of it had mounted to the public nostrils, the shame and horror of it was in the public mind. The voice of the people, grown suddenly strong, shrill, insistent, had broken in upon the serene quiet of the house and senate. Feeling ran high. Everywhere the lines were sharply drawn. The Capitol was becoming a battle-ground between two conflicting elements, roughly known as the reactionaries and the progressives. The vindictive feeling against the insurgents,

who had precipitated all this trouble, was not unnaturally reflected in the attitude of Miss Whitman's set. A social campaign was inaugurated as a part of the policy of defence, of the old guard. At last society was vitally interested in politics and politicians.

Fowler of North Dakota, one of Brandon's crowd, followed Whitman in a short speech. Fowler lacked the fine restraint of Brandon. Where Brandon with consummate skill used a rapier, he was apt to wield an axe. Mathilde noted the supercilious expression on Miss Whitman's face, the mocking smile that played about her mouth when Fowler's earnestness became excessive.

A much beruffled woman sitting near Mathilde, picking out celebrities on the floor, with the aid of a senate card, came to Brandon's name on the list. "Let's see," she murmured to her companion, "here is the third seat from the left, down the center aisle, but that man surely can't be Senator Brandon. He looks like an aristocrat and a plutocrat to boot; Senator Brandon must surely have horns, or some such distinguishing feature. My uncle Beatson considers him the most dangerous man in the senate and he ought to know, he's going on his second term here himself," she added, settling back comfortably for the purpose of light conversation.

Mathilde looked at her husband, a great pride in her heart. He was sitting at his desk, sorting over his papers, getting ready for action. He always gave the impression when he spoke of being intrenched behind an impregnable wall of facts. She never tired of seeing him, single-handed, riddling the arguments of his opponents, exposing their subterfuges, keeping the whole pack of them at bay. As a public speaker

unquestionably Brandon was an artist, but beneath the charm of the artist was the philosophic grasp of the thinker and the scientific competence of the indefatigable student, a student who was always master of his facts, an interpreter of them—never mastered by them. She thought of the weeks of hard work that went into the preparation of one of his speeches, of the endless pains he took to get his materials in hand, to compass his subject.

The speech itself, however, he never fashioned in advance. Once having captured his facts, he had no need to put them for safe keeping under lock and key, to imprison them in set and gilded phrases. Instead, he gave them free play in his mind, leave to rub elbows and hobnob together until he had need for them—when they came trooping at his call, quick to do his bidding. And the ideas he had been busy with, brooding over perhaps for weeks, clothed themselves in moving words, when the moment came for their expression, as spontaneously as one's talk with a long-desired friend springs out of the feeling stored up against his coming.

In his attack on the Federal administration of the railroads, Whitman had not hesitated to distort the truth, denying its achievements, exaggerating its shortcomings, and wilfully ignoring the fact that the roads had been operated in the midst of the unparalleled difficulties of a world war.

After a clearcut analysis of Whitman's specious arguments, and a concise summing up of the achievements of the Federal railroad administration, Brandon brought the issue down to the fundamental principle involved:

"In common with most American citizens, I shall

be glad to have the railroads given another chance to make regulated private operation a success. The chief question is, when, and under what conditions, can this best be done?

"There is no impending crisis that makes it either necessary or desirable to precipitate this change. As it is a matter of record that stockholders on most of the railroads during government operation have been receiving larger and more regular dividends than ever before, the present feverish demand for immediate action manifestly is not inspired by any anxiety for their welfare. Indeed, the only people who stand to gain by this proposed premature transfer are the speculators and manipulators who so long have run our railways primarily for their own predatory purposes, with service to the public, and even dividends to stockholders, as entirely secondary considerations.

"Now that we have seen what government operation can do under abnormal war conditions, might it not be well to see what it can do under normal peace conditions? At any rate, in all fairness should not the Federal Railway Administration be given sufficient time before handing back the roads to balance its accounts—involving as they do, billions of dollars expended on new rolling stock, maintenance of way, and renewals and betterments. Moreover, by carrying out this experiment to its logical conclusion, may we not gain information that will prove invaluable when later we attempt to organize a permanent national transportation system that so far as possible shall combine the advantages and eliminate the manifest disadvantages of both public and private operation?

"Until we have made a supreme effort to achieve this highly desirable result, I feel that any attempt to bring

about permanent railway nationalization is premature. But make no mistake; the American people are going forward, not backward. The demand of certain senators and railway executives for a relaxation of government supervision—for a policy of 'hands off' is fraught with danger. Any attempt to revert to the old time régime of unregulated private railway management would doubtless precipitate nationalization before many of its advocates feel the country is ready for it. Prior to the creation of the Interstate Commerce Commission, the power of railway magnates to change rates arbitrarily, to give special rates to friends or business allies, to refuse such rates and at critical periods even to refuse cars, at any price, to their competitors, thereby building up individuals, companies, cities, or sections of the country, to the undoing or ruin of their less favored rivals, injected an element of uncertainty into the business world which was like poison in the blood. Under those conditions the business world became, not an open field where merit won, but a baleful and bewildering arena, where conspirators struggled in the dark and where, as often as not, merit went down from a knife thrust in the back.

"To my mind the supreme advantage of government railway regulation should it succeed, or of government ownership, should regulation fail, would be not so much the resultant lowering of rates, amelioration of the conditions of labor, and improvements in the service, important though they are, but the emancipation of the people, rich and poor alike, from economic subjection to the irresponsible power of railway autocrats. It is not only incredible but quite impossible that a nation which has achieved its political freedom

long will consent to this insolent and intolerable form of industrial tyranny.

"When this question of railroad domination is shifted from the realm of academic discussion and becomes a political issue to be decided by the people, as soon it must be, permit me to warn the opponents of effective government regulation that it will be idle at such a time to attempt to head off government ownership, the only possible alternative of such regulation, by repeating the threadbare assertion, made to-day by the Senior Senator from Vermont, an assertion that so long has served as a substitute for sound argument,—that, however it might be in other countries, government railroads in America would prove a costly luxury!' Our people would reply, 'So be it!' If only government roads can give us economic freedom from railway tyranny, then are they a luxury that is infinitely desirable, a luxury that not only every nation can afford, but that no self-respecting nation can afford to be without. When liberty, either political or industrial is at stake, nations do not haggle about the price. Cost what it may, in money or even in blood, a virile people can always afford to be free."

CHAPTER XXVI

A FOUR LEAF CLOVER

THE Whitman party could scarcely wait for Brandon to be done, to make their escape into the corridor where they could give free vent to the feelings with which they had listened to his speech. After they had left, Mathilde, who had returned their greetings with outward calm, waited a few moments in the gallery trying to control the emotions roused in her by the sight of those women whose belligerent attitude towards Brandon was so well known, but her face was still flushed when she got into the elevator. She must not let things upset her so, she said, she must not be so intense, especially these days. What did anything matter—what that all the world might do or say could matter any more, now that she was to have her heart's desire? The great thought surged up in her soul like a tidal wave that sweeps the shore clean of all rubbish.

Wandering aimlessly down the corridor that connects the Senate with the House, she paused under the rotunda to glance at the paintings on the walls. Critical by nature, with a highly cultivated, almost supersensitive taste in art, she nevertheless found herself taking a real pleasure in these pictures that traced, if ever so crudely, the inspiring history of the early days of the Republic. Other nations might boast of their paintings, she thought, but what nation had greater

subjects? There was romance and poetry and the passionate pursuit of ideals in these heroic spirits who had set out on their great adventures,—Columbus, the Pilgrim fathers, Washington and his army at Valley Forge, all of them led by a vision, counting no sacrifices too costly, no hardships too great, if only they might help their dreams to come true.

Suddenly Mathilde remembered that group of progressives back in the senate. They were the spiritual descendants of these pioneers! A feeling of exaltation came over her. She walked slowly around the room, looking at the pictures more carefully, reading over again the titles of the scenes they represented.

A guide, quick to note her interest, hastened to offer his services. "A stranger in our city, lady? I can show you the sights of the capital in a half-hour. The Senate, the House, and the Supreme Court are in session now, pleased to point out all notorious characters."

She shook her head gravely, quite unconscious of the humor of the situation, and as she turned from his importunities, found herself face to face with the statue of Lincoln. Some hint of the immense tenderness of the man, the vast pathos of his life, had found its way into the figure, and stirred in Mathilde a feeling of passionate reverence which was the tribute of her whole being to the memory of Lincoln. There he stood under the great dome of the Capitol, this almost divine man of sorrows, who had borne in his heart a nation's anguish and died for the sins of his people.

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him" . . . the words came reverently to her lips . . . Lincoln! The very name was a nation's heritage! And those ideals that were the secret of his greatness,—the justice he lived for, the freedom he died for,—they were

not dead, they were immortal! Wherever they were lifted up, the truth would win its way.

Continuing her walk, Mathilde found herself in Statuary Hall, face to face with the marble figure of Frances E. Willard. Shading her eyes the better to decipher the inscription, she read slowly and then twice over again, for the words had a curious fascination for her. "Ah! it is women who have given the costliest hostages to fortune. Into the battle of life they have sent their best beloved, with fearful odds against them."

Stepping out on the portico for a breath of air, she felt a throbbing sense of the personality of this living, breathing city, and of the monument, that seemed to follow one everywhere, no matter where one wandered. There was no escaping it, that omnipresent, heaven-pointing shaft, standing so serenely apart from, and yet forever a part of the city's pulsing life.

She walked slowly down the long flight of steps to the lawn, sloping green in every direction, inviting one to wander far afield. The air was soft and balmy, more like May than March. It was a joy to let her feet sink into the soft earth after those stony miles of pavement she had come.

The words on Frances Willard's statue haunted her with a strange persistence. As though chiseled in her heart, they stood out in her memory more distinctly than from the shining marble. Half consciously she repeated them to herself as she strolled along, idly poking her umbrella among the tufts of clover, vainly trying to discover one that had four leaves. Just as she was giving up her quest, a tiny four leaf clover caught her eye, and she stooped gaily to pick it, slip-

ping it into her glove as though it were some happy omen for the future.

When it was time for the senate to adjourn, she started up the steps to join Brandon, but a feeling of faintness warned her that she should not go back. Instead, she would stay on for a little, walking over the grass, looking for more four leaf clovers to bring good luck to him and to her—good luck for his bill and for the child that was to be!

CHAPTER XXVII

FEET OF CLAY

THOMAS KINGMAN, one of the party leaders, had come to Washington eight years before as senator from Indiana. The dominant characteristic of Kingman was a cold and calculating ambition. He had not hesitated from the beginning to sacrifice everything to his desire to cut a figure in society as well as in politics. He had deliberately broken his engagement with a simple little woman he had intended to marry before the senatorial toga had fallen unexpectedly upon his shoulders, bearing in on him the imperative need of changing his program. She would not fit in with Washington; he knew enough of life there to feel sure of that. She would be a hindrance, an impediment. He would go there foot-loose, become famous, marry an heiress. He was built to succeed along large lines.

Thus he had reasoned out the matter and come to Washington alone. To his dismay and chagrin his plans to take the capital by storm had failed. Alone in his room at the hotel those first years, when the glamour of senate life had faded, he used to sit and think of the sacrifices he had made, and made in vain, gnashing his teeth in the face of a situation that wounded his pride and stirred him to regret and remorse. It used to come over him in those bitter hours, the thought of the happiness he had put from

him; sometimes it came to him that he had put it from Alice also, for she had died after he came away, and he knew that a part of his manhood had died with her. That was not an agreeable thought and he did not admit it often, even to himself; only sometimes when he was alone and off guard, a prey to bitter memories, it stole in upon him unawares and remained till he could rouse himself and drive it angrily away.

Gradually in the years, by slow and painful stages, he made his way up the social ladder till he was finally recognized by various members of the Smart Set, to the extent of being called in to fill an occasional seat at dinner, or bidden to a cup of tea or a garden party. But he lacked the polish, the easy-going ways of the man of the world, and the fact that he was conscious of this lack and consciously sought to supply it, did not add to his ease of mind or manner. It galled him that he should ever find himself in any company where he was received as it were on sufferance, where he did not feel at home. On the floor of the senate he had become the acknowledged leader in parliamentary debate, but it was characteristic of his restless nature that he was always seeking other worlds to conquer; and the thought that this particular world he sought and could not conquer was so small that it should be beneath his contempt only embittered him and made him the more determined to prevail.

He often had met Pauline Whitman, but her cold and distant manner always had nettled him. She was the sort of woman he had sacrificed Alice for, and, by all the tenets of his faith, she was the woman he should marry. Yet there seemed no shadow of this thought in her mind and no opportunity of suggesting it to her.

Kingman was mistaken in thinking that Pauline

Whitman had no inkling of his matrimonial ambitions. She was woman enough to understand intuitively his feeling for her, which she valued carelessly for what it was worth, treating him with a studied indifference, though it amused her to see him occasionally, to invite him now and then to one of her big affairs.

Of late, since this railroad agitation had become so insistent and her father and his friends were making such desperate efforts to retain their old time prestige, she began to sense a new way of turning her influence to account. She knew the value of wealth, of position; her long residence in Washington had taught her that. She remembered how on one occasion, in order to save her pet horse from a burning stable, the groom had rushed in, thrown a blanket over his eyes to blind him, and led him out. Men were not so different from horses, she reasoned. Some men needed only to be blinded, to be led. She had the power, she knew, to blindfold Kingman, to lead him if she chose. And Kingman was an important man, one of the crucial ones to be won over. Others looked to him, followed him. He could lead a stampede.

For some time Kingman had viewed with disfavor and a certain degree of foreboding the gradual shifting of the centers of political power in the senate, the creation of new alignments, the tendency toward the development of new leadership in both parties. In the midst of all this agitation in behalf of the people, all these excavations into senatorial records and roll-calls, which appeared to him so superfluous, it was borne in on Kingman that his own position was not so strong as it had been, nor his hold on his constituents so secure. The thought that a man of his unquestioned powers might be shorn of his strength, that there was

even a possibility of his being superseded as majority leader by some upstart like Fowler from North Dakota, was galling alike to his pride and to his sense of the fitness of things.

Seated at lunch one afternoon in the Senate café, he went over in his mind the political situation. Fowler had made a progressive speech a few days before, which had called out a good deal of favorable comment in the press. Fowler was referred to as a coming man. People seemed to believe in him. His ideas were getting popular. It might easily be the part of political wisdom, Kingman mused, for the Senior Senator from Indiana to change his tactics and join hands with the progressive men in his party.

If they could be convinced of the genuineness of his conversion, he felt sure he could become their leader. "And why shouldn't I join that crowd?" he asked himself.

Just at this point in his musing a gay little party came into the café and seated themselves at a reserved table. Braxton was there, making himself agreeable to the ladies; Brigham of Pennsylvania, Whitman, and Devoe, the "swells" of the senate.

From his corner Kingman could see Buffington at Miss Whitman's right; he knew they were angling assiduously for the junior senator from New Jersey. The whole company was laughing uproariously at one of Devoe's stories.

Why hadn't he been included in that party? Wasn't his vote as good as Buffington's? Hadn't he fetched and carried for that crowd long enough to be rewarded with an occasional seat at their table? Or was it because they felt so sure of him? He got up noiselessly, leaving his lunch half finished. He wanted to

get away before they noticed him, before Pauline sent him one of those cold little nods of hers, which told him more plainly than words that he was an outsider, that he need never expect to break into her charmed circle.

Alone in his committee room, puffing away at his cigar, Kingman picked up the argument that had been interrupted by the entrance of the luncheon party. Why shouldn't he join that other crowd? He knew they were in the right, and he had a feeling they were going to prevail. The not too distant future was theirs. Besides, there was something about them that had always appealed to Kingman; they were, if not his kind, at least the kind he had intended to be at first.

At heart Thomas Kingman felt himself far removed from the Judas some had pictured him. To be sure he had been involved in deals that had caused a lot of unnecessary comment in certain muckraking magazines, and he had voted pretty often with Braxton, as Brandon's records showed. But he was sufficiently convinced of his own powers, his magnetic hold on people, to feel sure that, if he made a clean sweep now of all these unholy alliances and took a firm stand in behalf of popular reform, his constituents would forget and forgive the past.

Brandon's bill and all this agitation about railroad legislation offered him a chance to drive in the entering wedge, turn right-about-face, become leader of the progressive wing of his party in the senate, and swing into line lukewarm senators like Thornton, Davidson, and others who usually followed him, in default of any deep-seated convictions of their own. With the opposition party split into warring factions of progressives and reactionaries, each trying to control the

presidential nomination, it looked as though Kingman's party, in spite of similar internal dissensions, if it developed a leader able to harmonize the conservatives and progressives, stood a good chance of electing its president. And that president—with the proper sort of alliances and understandings, might be—none other than—Thomas Kingman!

He shook himself impatiently, disgusted that his own ambitions should always loom the biggest thing on any horizon. Had he got to such a point, he wondered contemptuously, that a principle meant nothing to him unless some personal profit was pinned on to it? A retort he had heard Mrs. Brandon make at a dinner flashed into his mind—her answer to some smug sentiment the man on her right had expressed as to the wisdom of expediency in all things, especially in politics.

It was apropos of a hazardous stand Brandon had taken on the eve of his campaign for re-election, a stand the wiseacres were predicting would kill him politically.

"My husband will not compromise one inch in this matter," she had said. "He is determined his name shall always be associated with a clear-cut fight for principle." Kingman had been sitting near enough to catch the intensity in her voice. "That is a luxury we intend to allow ourselves, if we have to mortgage all our political prospects, and go back to the farm instead of to the senate."

And, by Jove, she had meant every word of it. That was the amazing thing, that human beings could mean what they said when they said a thing like that! He thought of Beckwith of Nebraska, who had gone under because of his progressive stand. The big inter-

ests in his district had put an end to him, got control of the legislature and sent Sherwood in his place. He almost envied Beckwith, a man who could go down to defeat like that rather than forfeit his principles. The thought stirred him. Why shouldn't he himself go in for something he really believed in, work for a cause, regardless of personal consequences, of whether as a result he went to the White House or back to private life? That would be living, to assert his independence, to join in a great crusade, to take the stand he had thought he would take when he and Alice used to read about the knights of the round table, and plan their future, dreaming the dreams of their youth for him.

He would like to give the other side, those men who felt they owned him body and soul, who regarded him as one of their sharp tools, a glimpse of his real self when aroused, fighting as he knew it was in him to fight for something his heart could be in. He thought of the few things he had believed in during all these years, of how he had deliberately sacrificed the zest of life, its choicest gifts and normal pleasures, to this cold, calculating policy of getting on, by fair means or foul. And how far had he got? What had he that counted? He deliberately faced the matter out, going over his gains and his losses, weighing the one against the other. In spite of his big bank account, his stocks and bonds, and his influence in Wall Street, it was clear that during all his life in Washington he had been playing a losing game, one that had robbed him of a man's rightful claim to self respect and to joy and pride in his work.

It came over him that beside the man he might have been, he was pitifully shrunken and shriveled. To sell one's own manhood, to betray, not another, but one's

self, for thirty pieces of silver; it was a poor bargain he had made with Mephisto!

That afternoon Thomas Kingman saw himself in a clearer light than he had known for years. Possessed of power such as he had never dreamed of in the early days, he was still alone, more bitter than ever, as he thought how his social ambitions had been baffled, how much at ease he had come to feel in the committee-rooms of Braxton and Whitman, how much of a stranger he still remained to their homes.

Lighting his cigar, he began walking up and down the room in long, determined strides. His mind was about made up. He would shut his door in the faces of these snobs, turn his back on their damnable schemes and trickery, shake himself loose and assert his freedom. He went over some telling points he could make in favor of Brandon's bill. They would realize too late what they had lost when they lost him!

Seated at his desk in the senate an hour later, Kingman was weighing the wisdom of the course he had determined upon, when looking up into the gallery to which the luncheon party had adjourned he received a most gracious smile that Pauline Whitman, regardless of senate etiquette, wafted down to him. The smile broke in upon his thoughts, dissipating the force of his arguments. Nothing could be more alluring than one of Pauline Whitman's smiles when it was intended for you.

Bent on following up the smile, he strolled over to the gallery for a chat with Miss Whitman. He arrived just in time to catch her laughing response to some facetious remark of Senator Devoe about suffragettes and women in politics.

"I have never bothered myself or anybody else about

'Votes for Women.' It's votes for my father's amendment that interest me." As Kingman took the seat vacated by Devoe, she demanded in a tone of camaraderie she had never before used to him, "Won't you promise me your vote? It would make me so very happy."

She held her head high and her eyes were flashing, but there was a note that Kingman did not fail to catch. He was on his own ground here, sure of himself, of his influence and power; she had made a direct appeal to him; his help was needed, help that he could give better than any other; there was recognition of all that in her voice, in her manner. Here was the right hand of fellowship at last that she offered him. She would throw open doors that had been closed to him; he could take his place in her world, by her side perhaps,—but he checked his imagination; one step was enough at a time.

He met her challenge as he had accustomed himself to meet everything that came, weighing the situation in the scales of his judgment, deciding how best it might be turned to his own account; but he could not hide from her the momentary flash of satisfaction that showed in his eye and made itself felt in his voice as he parried her question.

"I have heard so many arguments for and against this amendment that I confess I am bewildered how to find my way out—with honor." He laughed slightly to cover the sarcasm of the last words. "Perhaps you might shed some light on the situation. I should like to hear your statement of the case. I am still open to conviction," he added as an afterthought, looking full at her.

There was a second's pause before she answered;

then he heard her inviting him to call that evening, quite as though it were a matter of course, and himself accepting the invitation; and he knew a few minutes later, when he came down to the senate floor to answer a roll-call, that the die was cast; that suddenly everything in his life had changed, or rather had set. The vision he had had of himself as a free man was only a dream after all; he was to remain henceforth what he had so long been, what he had deliberately chosen to become, a slave, bound hand and foot with chains, which at least in that hour he had the clear vision to see and the manhood to acknowledge were of his own and not of another's forging.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CHALLENGE

DURING a special week of grand opera that spring the Italian Ambassador was host one night at a box party. Many glasses were turned toward the brilliant company which filled two boxes and presented a dazzling array of beauty, wealth, and distinction, the audience taking a curious satisfaction between acts in staring at these men and women who occupied the center of the stage at Washington. Soon the scenes would shift, and others would take their places, but for the time these were the actors who were playing the leading rôles in our national and international life.

Seated next to the beautiful American wife of the Ambassador was the Secretary of State, whose quick diplomacy had just helped to avert a war in the Far East, and who was being talked of for President. The Ambassador, covered with the decorations of his sovereign, rose from time to time to seat a belated guest and add her wrap to the rich pile of brocaded stuffs and costly furs which hung in the rear of the box.

An eye quick to note picturesque points in the political situation would have been struck by the fact that Senator Brandon and Senator Whitman happened to be so placed at the left and right wings of the boxes, as to emphasize their opposing position on the railroad question, which was causing such excitement throughout the country as well as in the senate. But few in

the audience were thinking of policies of state, and for most, the men in the boxes, interesting as they were in the abstract realm of politics, served to-night only as a background for the long row of women whose costumes stood out in such brilliant relief. Jewels flashed and eyes sparkled; everywhere there was animation, gaiety, life.

The tiara of Lady Becket, wife of the British Ambassador, attracted much comment. It was known to have been given her by royalty. The severe simplicity affected by Mrs. Baldwin, wife of the Chief Justice, whose wit and originality were her distinctive social assets, acted as a foil to the dark beauty of the wife of the Brazilian Ambassador. Prince Riccardi, a well known polo player, sat during the entire evening staring covertly at Mrs. Burton, the dashing young wife of an elderly millionaire, when he wasn't openly devouring her with his little beady black eyes. It was interesting to outsiders to watch these two, to speculate on the current gossip about them.

During the last *entr'acte* a woman in the audience shifted her glass from Prince Riccardi and Mrs. Burton to Mathilde, who was engaged in an animated conversation with the junior senator from New Jersey. She had her head partly turned from the audience and was leaning toward Buffington, her face aglow.

"That looks like another intrigue," the woman murmured to the man beside her, handing him her glass for confirmation of her theory. "The best people seem to go in for that sort of thing," she added with a secret bitterness that the opportunity had never been given to her to flutter perilously around the same flame.

"It seems to be the chief interest in their lives," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders.

The woman cast a disdainful glance at her commonplace husband. A clerk in one of the departments, he had saved his money and sacrificed himself, in order to give her this taste of good music and this far-off glimpse of society.

"I suppose one can't be swell and decent at the same time, but I'd be willing to take the risk," she went on with a reckless laugh. "I wonder who that woman is and what she is saying to that man; she seems enough in earnest about it."

"It's evidently more interesting to them than what Elizabeth is saying to Tannhauser," her husband answered, repressing a yawn as he turned toward the stage, where the prima donna again claimed the attention of the audience.

The conversation between the junior senator from New Jersey and Mathilde, doubtless would have been a surprise to the woman in the orchestra if she could have focused her hearing as easily as she did her sight, on these two, and learned the kind of influence Mrs. Brandon had exerted on Buffington since their first meeting in Washington.

Something about the promise of his youth, the high possibilities within his reach, had made a peculiar appeal to Mathilde's interest and sympathy. She had been quick to feel the idealism of the man, striving to hold its own against the insidious efforts of the system to get possession of him body and soul.

From his first appearance in Washington the big interests had marked Buffington for their own, philosophically deciding when he was elected to the senate on a wave of reform to make the best of the situation and appropriate him to their uses as speedily as possible.

Buffington represented a railroad district, where the interests of his most powerful constituents were vigorously opposed to progressive legislation. He had been given to understand that his support of genuinely progressive railroad policies would mean political suicide, while a stand for "safe and sane" policies would mean an assured political future.

At first Buffington had taken the greatest delight in coming to the Brandon house, but lately he had felt uncomfortable in that atmosphere and had almost ceased his visits. Mathilde in the enthusiasm of her spirit had such a way of calling out and getting a man enamoured of the highest. Then afterward the old fight would be on harder and fiercer than ever. His ambition, played upon continually by flattery and other subtle appeals seemed gradually to be gaining the right of way in his life. This evening something drove him to open up the subject of Brandon's proposed bill, and he told her bluntly the facts he had to face.

She listened while he went over the ground he had covered so often in arguments with himself, telling of the insuperable difficulties in the way of his support of the bill, how it would mean cutting off at one stroke all possibility of doing effective work in the senate, in favor of other desirable measures.

"And for what?" he demanded vehemently. "For a sentiment. It practically amounts to that, for there is hardly a shadow of a chance that such a measure can pass at this time. My support of it now on the eve of my campaign for re-election would mean throwing away my vote and my political head after it. The truth is people are not educated up to this bill. You can't force that sort of thing. It's passage might even do more harm than good, possibly bring on a panic;

there is such a sentiment against it, especially in the East. Oh! I know," he went on quickly, in answer to a look she flashed at him, "I feel that eventually we shall come to something like this if not to government ownership. I want you to realize that I have not arrived at this decision without a struggle. But I am honestly convinced," he concluded abruptly, "that the only thing for me to do now is to vote against the bill, and I am glad of this opportunity to tell you my reasons for believing that, everything considered, this is the only possible course for me."

Even as he spoke the old doubts sprang up to torment him, raising again the whole miserable subject he had thought finally settled. He paused, waiting for Mathilde to speak. Some word from her, some quick look of sympathy, of understanding, would have set his mind at rest and convinced him, past all shadow of miserable doubting, that his course was right. But she did not speak, and her silence nettled him, put him more than ever on the defensive.

"In a way I am compromising," he went on quickly. "but, on the other hand, there is my whole future to consider, my career which is at stake. I must weigh everything in the balance, take all the factors into account, be willing to yield one point in order to gain others."

If he did not antagonize certain senators in the matter of this particular bill, he had every assurance they would back him later in some measures in which he was vitally interested. There was the Children's Bill, for instance; to win the chance to put that through was surely worth some sacrifice, some compromise.

Mathilde sensed the deep feeling that always possessed him when he spoke of the Children's Bill. The

first time she met him they had talked of it. Their common interest in it had been a bond between them from the beginning. And the system, which had vigorously opposed this measure a few years back, was using it now as a bribe. Times had changed. The system also was learning to compromise, to choose the lesser of two evils. . . . And Buffington's enthusiasm for that bill had blinded him to the enormity of the price he was asked to pay for it! For a few moments Mathilde's attention was diverted from what he was saying by her own thoughts. His last words called her back.

"So I have made up my mind to sacrifice certain points in order to get and to keep—*power!*"

"Power," he flung the word out defiantly; into it was crystallized all the ambition of the man. For the moment he was dazzled by the glittering vision. His eyes shone; his voice vibrated; his whole attitude was exultant like that of some reckless Alpine climber who stands with his feet on the last ledge of slippery rock that rises between him and his goal, unmindful of the precipice that waits to engulf him—seeing only the snowy peaks ahead!

It was the old promise, Mathilde thought, that man had been making since first he had felt the need of appeasing his guilty conscience, this promise of some future good to justify a present evil.

"Surely," she said to herself, as she listened to Buffington and remembered other words he had spoken, "he has come a long way down into the valley from the heights where he stood once and looked into the future."

Instinctively she felt his effort had been to convince himself not her. He was not yielding without a strug-

gle. There was hope in that, and room still for faith. Those vehement words of his gave her the impression of a man who was being borne on by some power that was working to destroy him; they were like the call of his innate manhood for help to save him from himself.

There was a profound pity in her soul, a resolve that he should not yield to this subtle appeal of materialism before some appeal of the spirit had been made to him. She turned on him a troubled look in which fear that her words might be misunderstood seemed to struggle with her desire to help, but she began bravely, all thought of herself slipping from her as she realized his danger.

"If it is a question of power, is it not wiser and surer in the end, to depend on power which comes as a result of adherence to what we know is right, than on the kind that comes from any lower source,—which must, in the very nature of things, be a lower form of power. It's one sort of power that can keep one a senator, but sometimes quite another sort that can keep one a *man*.

"I do not mean, you surely understand," she added quickly, as she noted his flush at her last words, "I do not mean to sit in judgment on anything you may do, or even presume to advise you, but what you have said has only convinced me," she continued, choosing her words carefully, as one seeks out an obscure path in a tangled wood, "that the course you have decided on seems to be expedient, not that it is right."

The expression struck her as familiar, and realizing she had stumbled unconsciously on a path another had hewn for her, she went on swiftly—almost buoyantly—"You remember how Wendell Phillips put it. 'No mind is comprehensive or far-seeing enough to be able to

foretell the ultimate consequences of any great social change, but if there be any element of right, of justice, at stake, choose the right and leave it to the God who made it right to see that it prove expedient!'

"Things do seem inextricably tangled sometimes, I quite agree, the good so involved with the evil that it's almost hopeless to try and separate the one from the other; but that is the way with life, where the lights and the shadows are forever disputing the field.

"It seem particularly so with your life just now," she went on, sure at last she had found the right word, "but I have a deep-set feeling, which amounts to a faith, that the lights will prevail and drive all the phantoms of darkness from before you. There is such a thing as even the darkness being made light for us—the miracle of the morning repeated in human lives, where God's laws surely work as unerringly as among his planets and suns."

Her soul had found its way into her eyes, and shone full on him for an instant. . . . "It cannot be that the stars are guided in their courses while men go stumbling to their ruin. . . .

"So there's my rather roundabout woman's reason for feeling so sure about you," she added with a sudden change in her voice from intense emotion to almost child-like eagerness. "Some people might have fixed ideas, or even advice to give. I, in my ignorance, yet with my faith—offer you—only my congratulations in advance!" She turned from him, her last words caught up in the opening bars of the chorus that heralded Tannhauser's return—that majestic Pilgrim's Chorus—perfect expression in music of the triumph of a soul.

It was a relief to Buffington, when the lights were

turned off, to be able to sink back unnoticed in the shadows of the box. He was conscious of a vague wish that this other light, which Mathilde had turned on this whole subject, illumining it with such unpleasant distinctness, could also be turned off at will, that the fierce glare of truth again could be softened to the dim, flickering light of uncertainty.

"They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." The words flashed across his mind, calling a sudden halt to his thoughts. Had he come to this, then, that it annoyed him to have the light turned on his actions, his motives?

Well, the light was on, whether it pleased him or not. He sat absorbed in thought, the old tormenting question Mathilde's words had raised, again possessing him. Subtle temptations, visions of an assured career flitted before him, while the knowledge of what he inevitably would be called on to sacrifice if he antagonized men like Braxton and Whitman was clear. But his course was not so clear as it had been; an angel had troubled the waters, ruffling the hard-won calm of his conscience.

"Suppose I'm not a senator or a justice," he said to himself fiercely, "I would at least be a free man, no corporation tool." He shuddered at the picture the words brought before him and glanced involuntarily in the direction of Braxton. "A stool pigeon then, or a man?" he put the question, taking up full-blown the argument, the germ of which had been wafted like pollen from Mathilde's mind to his. As he sat there, looking at the matter from this point of view, a sudden light seemed to flood the situation. He began to realize that she had been pleading with him, not for the bill—her husband's bill—but for himself, his man-

hood; and by some subtle, swift play of inner vision it became clear to him that while the bill was not dependent on him, in a way, his whole future—the strength or the weakness of his character and his fitness for public service—was dependent upon his attitude towards the bill.

The whole effect of her words had been to change the question from one of political policy to one of spiritual motive, to lift the issue out of the realm of politics, where expediency seemed the highest law, to the realm of principle, where the soul held the scepter and ruled by divine right.

So preoccupied had been his mind, so far away his thoughts that he was only aware the opera was over when he saw people in the audience putting on their hats and the men in the boxes helping the women with their wraps. Prince Riccardi had Mrs. Burton's cloak in his outstretched arms, and was folding her into it as though he were performing some mystic rite.

Mathilde turned to Buffington a look of appeal. "Can you rescue my wrap from that mass of millinery? Yes, the white one with the sable." As he held it for her, she found herself saying good-night, explaining to him that probably this was good-by for a long time, as she was going to Ohio and did not expect to return to Washington before the holidays.

"That is why I am so glad to have had this talk to-night," she told him, with one of her swift smiles. "I'm quite sure you will not be angry with me. Remember, I still believe even against your unbelief—that the highest will win."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE HIGHWAY

SHORTLY after the Ambassador's opera party the Brandon house was closed, and Mathilde was preparing to return to Cleveland. She had been delayed, waiting for Mackenzie to finish her miniature. As she sat for him, dreaming of her child, she used to wonder if he could divine what was passing in her soul. But what man can know this woman's secret of the ages? What mortal can lift this veil from the holy of holies of humanity's heart, except those who have entered in?

When the picture was done, she felt it was worth any price. How foolish she had been to dream of denying this to her husband and her son. It was like the box of precious ointment that Mary poured out at the feet of her Lord. She had been like Judas: "This money might have been given to the poor." Ah, but Love had its divine warrant, sometimes to shut the door on all but its beloved. "The poor ye have always with you, but Me ye have not always." How strong the feeling was coming to be that they might not have her always. So her heart cried out passionately, no ointment was too precious for her husband, no price too costly for this first, perhaps this last gift, to her son.

The morning Brandon left for Wildwood, to see that everything was in readiness for her, Mathilde brought him the miniature, in the plain gold case she had designed for it. On the inside, in her own handwriting,

were engraved the words "For my husband. Myself—Mathilde." A secret spring she had not the courage to show Brandon, opened another compartment wherein were engraved these words, also in her own handwriting:

> "For my son, whom having not seen I love;
> In whom, though now I see him not, yet
> believing, I rejoice."

And below:

> "You made no vows, but vows were made for you,
> That you should be, else sinning greatly,
> A consecrated spirit."

Brandon, who had not been allowed to see the miniature before, was speechless with delight. This flawless piece of work seemed shot through with radiance as though the genius of the artist had caught fresh fire from Mathilde's spirit and wrought out the likeness by that inner light.

When the morning came for Mathilde to start, a strange impulse held her. Brandon was waiting for her impatiently; her trunks were packed; all her farewells had been said; there was apparently no excuse for further delay, yet she had an inexplicable feeling that she must stay on one more day.

Unable to shake off this feeling, she wrote Brandon: "An absurd impulse, most husbands would say, but you are different from most husbands—you who have always understood me so lovingly, and loved me so understandingly! So I know you will take me on faith once more, be patient with this fantastic feeling, as you have been with all the other twists and turns my fancy has taken in all these blessed years since you

took me! You remember old Uncle Abe's announcement: 'There will be preaching in this house next Wednesday night, the Lord willing, and Sunday morning whether or no!' To-morrow I shall come, 'whether or no,' follow my heart to you and Wildwood."

After finishing her note, Mathilde took up the morning newspaper and read the headlines. "Tragic death of Weston Farwell. Killed in auto accident."

Instantly she knew what had been holding her. This was why she could not start. Here was a way at last opened up for her to go to Mrs. Farwell. Nothing was strange in that now, or forced. It was suddenly very simple. Death, the great mystery, made everything else seem clear. Against that dark background the realities of life stood out in sharp relief and in their true perspective, above all the formalities and conventions that enslave people, above the artificial barriers that hold human intercourse down to banalities and bind the soul to earth when it would find its way among the stars.

As her car stopped at the Farwell mansion Mathilde wondered if, after all, there could be any chance of seeing Mrs. Farwell. At any rate, she said to herself, she would have done her part. She could only leave the matter there.

The heavy doors opened noiselessly before she rang. A man in livery held out a tray for her card.

She hesitated a moment; it would have seemed so strange a thing to do yesterday; then she heard herself asking the man to have her card sent up; it was possible Mrs. Farwell might wish to see her. As she stood waiting in the hall, she noticed the stacks of cards piled in orderly rows by the impassive butler, who was open-

ing the door and shutting it on this day no more solemnly than on any other.

In the background, forms of servants could be seen, moving silently. All the wheels were in running order; the machinery of the house working perfectly. Hardly anything was different on the surface; only the master of the house lying there, and the woman alone upstairs; this the last act in their drama.

Presently a maid came to say Mrs. Farwell would see Mrs. Brandon.

As Mathilde followed the maid she caught a glimpse of the solemn-looking funeral director in charge, with his assistants, bent on making this last function a success, as much of a success as those achieved by the caterers who had always done such great things in this house. Now it was his chance. He would make the most of it.

The air was heavy with the scent of flowers from the drawing-rooms and conservatories nearby. Hardly more marked to-day, however, Mathilde imagined, than on other days. For there must always have been flowers in abundance here.

In the darkened room with its massive furnishings, its cold and oppressive grandeur, the one human figure crouching by the fire seemed to Mathilde inexpressibly lonely and homeless. Mrs. Farwell half rose, then sank back in her chair, as though the effort had exhausted her.

Mathilde spoke very gently, laying a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley on a table close by, "I have no right to come to you, except as my great desire to help you, the feeling that perhaps I might be of some comfort, gives it to me." She reached out impulsively and took both Mrs. Farwell's hands in her own. "I am going

away to-morrow for a long time, I hardly know how long; that is what has made me so bold. Ever since the Seward-Pell ball I have wanted to see you again, to say what was in my heart to say that night, how much it seemed to me life might hold for you. And now, even though death has come, it does not alter that. Death only reinforces the message of Life, makes it more insistent. Life still holds for you such immense treasures." She paused, glancing at the rich tapestries, the superb mountings of the room, "I mean such treasures as only the soul can possess, the soul that in some great crisis, wakes at last to find God, when it had thought perhaps that He was dead to it and it was dead to Him."

Only a low moan escaped the woman, and Mathilde went on; all the compassion in her heart had found its way into her voice.

"You remember that stern command with the promise folded at the heart of it! 'Prepare in the desert a highway for your God.' That is what life must seem to you now, a desert, parched and scorched, where you walk with bleeding feet. I know the anguish, the bitterness; but the joy, the hope, is this, that in the very desert, the waste places of our lives, we can prepare a highway,—a Highway for our God."

She rose and bent over the woman. "You will understand, and forgive my coming now. If I can ever be of any help to you, you will let me be your friend."

Mrs. Farwell tried to speak, but her voice failed her. For a moment she clung to Mathilde like a child who fears to be left alone in the dark. Then through the first tears that had come to soften her heart, she said brokenly, "God must be good to have sent you. The Highway—I shall remember—the Highway."

CHAPTER XXX

THE CROSS ROADS

WHEN Mathilde came back from Mrs. Farwell's, her own dismantled house seemed strangely quiet and restful. The empty rooms, the bare walls, all spoke of an era that was closed. As she watched the sun sink behind the trees in the park across the way, she had a contented feeling that for a while at least her work was done. She too could drop out of sight for a little, pass out of this silent house that held so many memories, out of the city where such stirring experiences had come to her, out of this strenuous, seething life, back to the peace of Wildwood, to await the dawn of a new day!

Her trunks were packed and sent to the station. The servants were gone. She and her faithful French maid were alone in the house this last night. In her bedroom there remained of all her intimate belongings only her travelling case and a big bowl of red roses some one had sent the day before. The impersonal air of the place gave her the same sensation of restfulness she had often felt in a strange hotel, where, free from all care and responsibilities, she was as safe from intrusion as if alone on a desert island.

About eight o'clock Marie brought her tea and toast and a salad, which she ate in luxurious ease, sitting by the wood fire in her dressing-gown.

As she was finishing her supper the bell rang, and

Marie came to say the French Ambassador was waiting below in the hall. He had been out of town for a month, had only just heard Monsieur and Madame were going away, and wondered if there were a chance to see Madame and say *au revoir*. If not, he would leave his adieux.

Mathilde coiled her hair in a loose knot, slipped into her travelling gown and ran down the steps, carrying with her the bowl of red roses. "To light up this dismal house," she laughed, as she set the flowers on the empty mantel and shook hands with the Ambassador.

"It is as good in you to come down as it is audacious in me to have asked for you this last night," he said, "but there are extenuating circumstances in my case. I heard at the Club only this evening, on my return from Maine, that you were closing your house. I saw the lights as I was passing and made bold to enter, on the chance of being able to say *au revoir*. For I too am going away, going back to France."

"Back to France!" Mathilde repeated. "Sit down on that packing-case and tell me all your plans; and your hunting trip, was it *un grand succés?* Did you get big game?"

Monod smiled at her question. "That was a good tale to tell the newspapers, but I was not hunting big game. It was myself I went after in those wilds of Maine. It was myself at last I found"; he straightened himself and looked full at Mathilde, "the self that Paul Marillier always believed in, and that your question one night, here in this room, sent me out in search of, to see if it really existed, if it could be resurrected."

Mathilde leaned towards him with shining eyes, but she did not speak and he went on: "Your suggestion about my going back to France flashed across my mind

that night like some totally new idea. Yet I realize now that you merely voiced a subconscious desire that has been in my heart all these years. When war broke, this desire flamed up like a consuming passion; my one idea was to get back—into the trenches—anywhere that I could find a chance to fight for France. The thought of staying on in Washington three thousand miles away was maddening but my Government insisted my post was here."

"And America and France are both debtors to you for the way you have filled that post. Paul Marillier was right; he knew you better than you know yourself. These years of war, at least, you have been the spiritual representative of the France he loved."

Monod did not speak and Mathilde went on gently, for this was their first meeting since Marillier's death. "I shall never forget a talk I had with him at a dinner to the French High Commission. How frail and bird-like he looked, what boyish eagerness there was about him and what grace of spirit! At first the sheer simplicity of the man almost threw me off the track. I wondered, can he be so great? But when he began to talk I knew there was no mistake; he was indeed one of the Immortals!

"Nothing one could tell him of your achievements could take that serene faith of his in you by surprise. It was a part of his faith in France which was a part of his Faith in God. To have had you not fail, and France not fail, and God not fail—it is very beautiful to have helped vindicate a faith like that in a man like Marillier. . . . That is what I felt when the news of his death came and I thought of you."

"I am glad he saw America and I am glad you had that glimpse of him," Monod said. "France has sent

some great men to the States during the war; a great multitude she has sent to the Elysian fields, but, among them all, no more gallant soul than Paul Marillier. It was his glory that before he died for France he lived all his life long for France."

"When do you start?" Mathilde asked the question after a few moments, as one drops oil into machinery to set the wheels running smoothly.

"I don't know when my resignation will be accepted nor how soon they can arrange for my successor, but I shall not be here when you return and I have wanted greatly to tell you how much it has meant to me—the privilege of your friendship, and that of your husband. In your drawing room I have been exposed to the contagion of the new spirit that is beginning to remake this country. I have seen signs of the soul that America is developing within her huge bulk of a body. I am thankful I was here in Washington during the war when that soul flowered, as it were, overnight to such beauty, when America found herself and gave herself to save the world!

"Can you ever forget that night," he went on glowingly, "when Justice Harwood's dinner party adjourned breathlessly to the Capitol and we got there just in time to hear that incomparable speech of the President asking for a declaration of war?"

"How every tiny light in the Capitol from basement to dome burned and beckoned," said Mathilde, "the torch of Liberty aflame, aloft at last!"

"I can't say in any detail," Monod went on slowly in answer to another question from Mathilde, "just what I shall do. But in a crisis such as confronts my country now, when France must find her way out of this maze of ruin, despair, and death, build again her

waste places and reconstruct her life, the most my hands and brain can do will be the least that will satisfy my heart. Two million Frenchmen wiped out! And now Paul Marillier gone! If death brings forth life surely new life for France must come out of all that dying!"

He paused; some pent up power of emotion, of heroic feeling that for once he felt no shame to show, seemed loosed in him. As he looked at Mathilde, he knew this feeling was the gathered-up force of the appeal she had made to him since the first time he had seen her, a bride at the mansion, an appeal to what was highest and most chivalric in him, as simple and direct as the elemental appeal Nature makes to us when we are alone with her on the ocean or in the mountains, to match her calm with our own, to be for the moment as truly ourselves and our best selves as she is always her best self.

He got up abruptly. "A thousand apologies. I have been a spendthrift with your time to-night. I cannot permit myself to go deeper into your debt," he ended, resuming his old manner, dropping back to the conventional plane. In an instant he was the polished man of the world again, the Ambassador of France taking leave of his hostess.

Mathilde felt rather than understood the swift transition in his manner. He seemed to her like some knight who at the first sign of danger dons his armor and goes out to do battle. *"Dieu et mon droit,"* she said, as she held out her hand in farewell. "It is a great adventure!"

CHAPTER XXXI

WAITING

MATHILDE'S first days at Wildwood were full of a strange peace as she gave herself up to a mystic communion with her child, an outpouring of her spirit to this spirit that was beginning to be, soul of her soul, flesh of her flesh. "Oh God, let there be life," her heart had cried, and the miracle was being wrought while she waited for life and immortality to be brought to light.

As the weeks went by, however, this peace was broken by intervals of restlessness when the great fear that she had struggled against in Washington came back with persistent force, like some evil dream forever lurking in the background of her consciousness. There came also flashes when her woman's vision seemed to pierce like an arrow straight through the time of waiting, to the birth-struggle which was preparing.

Slowly, in spite of all her agonized effort to crush it, the feeling grew that only one life was to survive this birth, that somehow the decision was to rest with her, which life it should be. The gradual evolution of this feeling from a vague premonition, that she tried to put from her as a shadow cast by her feverish imagination, to a slowly growing conviction that she battled with in her despair, until finally it seemed to become a mysterious part of God's will, which she strove to make her own, deliberately facing the decision and

choosing, if indeed it should be necessary, to die that her child might live—all this she was powerless to understand. Only something made her feel quite sure that he was to be born not so much of the will of the flesh as of the will of the spirit—his birth the symbol, even though her body were defeated, of the triumph of her soul.

When she had made the decision that no sacrifice could be too costly, to lay deep and sure a spiritual foundation for his life, Mathilde was able for the most part to face the future calmly, by a determined effort of mind and will, transmuting the fear that at times stole upon her out of ambush, into faith that an angel would surely be sent from heaven to spare her, as Abraham had been spared, once he had offered up the sacrifice in his heart.

Vivid as her imagination was, however, and keen as were her powers of visualizing, she rarely saw herself with her child,—a veil seemed to shut her out. It was just the boy and his father; she was almost never in the picture. Only when she slept did she catch the vision splendid.

On waking one morning, the memory of a dream about her boy going off to school was so vivid that she decided to write it down, while it was still fresh in her mind, in a letter he should read some far-off day. Writing it out for him seemed such a perfect way of bridging the gulf between them, that as the days went by she found herself writing other letters, letters into which she poured all the pent-up joys and fears that possessed her, joys too sacred even to breathe to her husband, fears that at any cost must be kept from him.

So a tiny packet of letters to her son grew out of

the great need of her heart to speak, every shifting mood caught and reflected, as a mountain lake reflects each passing cloud. Sometimes there were mere scattered phrases, merry little confidences just for him, blithe, sweet nothings that only the heart of a child could understand, croonings that stilled her own soul to rest in the silence that folded them in, those two—none other. At times there were passionate outbursts, cries of anguish, as she caught sight of a vision that blackened the horizon. . . .

"Last night, like almost every night, I dreamed of you. A queer medley of a dream it was, wherein I saw you in so many vivid phases—first as a baby, nestling warm and close where God's angels had put you—safe at last in my arms; and then in a flash, as a man, speaking from some platform winged words that thrilled me strangely. But as I looked about to find where I was, and if this were really you, the scene changed again—such a topsy-turvy dream—and you were a boy of fourteen, just starting off to Groton. You were bidding me good-by, and my heart was breaking, and you—you were so sad and so glad all in the same breath, for another vista of this wonderful thing called life was opening out before you—the far call of the future was sounding in your ears—new forces and mysteries that lay in wait and beckoned to you to follow on and on, where I could not go.

"That was the only spot on your sun that day—leaving me—but it shone very brightly just the same. When you and your father started down the long road that led you away from me, out into the world of men, my heart gave such a wild throb of pain as I turned back into the empty house that I suddenly waked to the world of reality in which as yet you had no part.

"Yesterday I saw a mother with her child. I have seen hints of joy like hers in some of Raphael's pictures. Shall I see anything half so beautiful in heaven? 'A little lower than the angels,' did David say? Ah, he never knew—the angels must look *up* to catch that smile on mothers' faces everywhere.

"These days I cannot see a mother with her child without growing faint with longing to take my place among the mothers with their children in their arms. Just to feel a baby-life set free and yet forever coming back to renew its life in mine; baby hands that cling to me and baby smiles that mirror back my own; baby lips that lisp my name and teach me how to pray—Ah, it is that my heart cries out for—that, and nothing more! What can Heaven be to me? Streets of gold on which I may forever pace, trying to forget what I have left on earth: sounds of angel-voices and hosannas that cannot drown one far-off cradle cry; pearly gates that swing wide open and then close on all my heart's desire. Oh, God, what madness is this that you ask of me? I cannot, I will not go! I will live, live in this glad world, with my child, and for my child alone."

* * * * * * *

"Sometimes I think it is not just because you are my son, that if need be I can die for you. If I did not believe you could do more than I, I should not feel I had the right to go. It is not just the baby form in its weakness that cries out to me for strength, the appeal of a baby life that has no hope to live except through me; there is something deeper and more compelling in your claim on life. I seem to see—past the baby years, past the baby needs—you grown to manhood, and the

world of groping men lifting mute, helpless hands to you, as you lift baby hands to me.

"My son, the passion to help those helpless ones is so strong at times, that if I had to choose and could feel myself more equal to their needs than you, I believe I should choose to live. . . . Ah! that would be the greater sacrifice! To deny you life that I might live for them would be too hard, so if one of us must go, God will let me choose the easier way—to die for you, that you may live for these!"

* * * * * * *

"For a while, each day, as it went by, gave me a little parting stab of pain. I have lived always so freely, so richly, my life a miracle of joy, all my days garnered up to make one golden sheaf! The idea of death used to terrify me when I thought of it as putting an end to my beautiful day, taking me away from life, and life away from me. But since it has come to me that my going, if go I must, is to be just the opening of the narrow door through which you may enter in, I know that my death, even as my life, is to have its crown of joy. So if I go, I shall go with a song in my heart, my little son, whom having not seen I love, in whom though now I see you not, yet believing I rejoice!"

CHAPTER XXXII

PERPLEXITIES

IT was a great trial to Brandon that owing to a tremendous pressure of work in the senate, he was able to be with Mathilde so much less than he had expected. For the month of April and part of May, he was senate bound, "held," as he wrote her, "by a swirling succession of political upheavals only to be explained by a specialist in post-war pathology."

"The pendulum has taken a violent swing," his letter continued. "It seems an age since the other day when working men and capitalists stood shoulder to shoulder fighting and dying for a common cause. The anti-social forces are in the ascendant, capital and labor are locking horns and no one pretends to predict the outcome.

"I am between two fires—frenzied financiers on one side promoting Whitman's railroad bill, the most gigantic Treasury raid ever attempted, and theoretical syndicalists on the other trying by means of the Plunkett bill to place the transportation facilities of the country in the hands of an autocracy of labor.

"Both bills are the work of extremists obsessed by a class consciousness. Such extremists are a source of toxic poison whether they be found conspiring in the secret councils of capital or in the secret conclaves of labor.

"But enough of shop and of this tiresome business

that has kept me marooned here so many miles away from you. Soon, very soon now, I shall be taking in reality that belated journey to Wildwood my heart takes so many times a day."

By the middle of May, Brandon's forces were well organized and he and Braxton had a tacit understanding that the vote on his bill should be taken early in June, just before Congress adjourned.

While not at heart favoring Brandon's bill the conservative element in his own party did not dare openly to oppose it. Certain members, possibly more cautious than conscientious, felt that they could not afford to defeat so popular a measure, when a presidential campaign was coming on and they themselves were standing for re-election. On the whole, Brandon considered the bill's chances good. At any rate all that he could do had been done. Henceforth his whole time and thought were for Mathilde.

He came home carefree and lighthearted as a schoolboy on a holiday and Mathilde met him in a gala mood that matched his own, every vagrant fear dispelled by his presence, all her restlessness swallowed up in an immense peace, a fulness of joy that possessed her, body and soul. She wrote no more letters to her son; the day Brandon came she put away those she had written; the blessed little packet! Some day they would read them together, the boy and she!

Two days after Brandon's return, Charleston rode out to Wildwood to see the Senator and assure himself that all was well with Mathilde.

"We were waiting till you came to buckle down in earnest to the railroad question," Mathilde laughed in response to Charleston's demand for the latest news from the front. "We've scarcely mentioned politics

yet, there has been such a world of more important matters," she added, as a maid brought in the tea.

"The internal troubles of the railroads and the variety of panaceas proposed are enough to bewilder the lay mind," Charleston said, drawing up a chair to the tea table and lighting his cigarette at the alcohol blaze. "The roads blame the inter-state commerce commission for their present shaky condition, but that is ridiculous on the face of it."

"A dope fiend might as well blame his unsteady nerves on the doctor who had cut down his daily dose of dope," Brandon replied.

"I was delighted to see that your railroad bill passed the House, but I didn't get the details. What is your solution for the problem?"

"The railroad problem is by no means insoluble if gone at with the sole purpose of giving everyone a square deal. Outworn theories must be scrapped, and practical considerations given the right of way. My proposals can be summed up in two words, consolidation and coöperation.

"First, of course, as a matter of common sense and common honesty, the legitimate interests of stockholders must be taken care of. Unless this is done, railway capital will shrink just when it is most important that it should expand quickly and adequately. But for the same reason the illegitimate demands of speculators and manipulators must be rejected. Prospective investors will think twice before putting their money into railway stocks and bonds, if they suspect that billions of dollars' worth of present securities are pure, or rather impure water, representing nothing but manipulator profits.

"Moreover, while capital undoubtedly should be

allowed to retain a controlling voice in management, labor and the public should be permitted to participate in both management and excess profits. The mere fact that the public and employees, through their representatives, had access to inside details of management, would do more to eliminate unfairness and graft than a whole code of regulatory legislation. It also would eliminate a host of unfounded suspicions of unfairness and graft. If anything has become clear it is that there can be no efficiency in railway operation with labor sullen from real or imaginary grievances."

"I was surprised to see that your bill did not provide for out-and-out Government operation," Charleston interposed.

"That's what the opposition was expecting, but by incorporating into the bill a method of quasi-coöperative management and profit sharing, we hope to get better results than have been secured from either public or private operation in the past."

"I should think such a bill could be passed by unanimous consent. What fair-minded man would oppose such a measure?"

"Wait and see," Brandon replied. "I am not characterizing its opponents, but I can guarantee a large and aggressive array of them. We can hardly expect the men who have been making millions and tens of millions looting not only the public but also railroad stockholders whose interests they were supposed to represent, suddenly to forget the habits and instincts of the financial jungle and submit without a struggle to having their claws clipped and their fangs drawn!"

"The result is on the lap of the gods, or rather, on the lap of the United States Senate—worse luck! But you surely have done your part and earned your right

to a respite before the next battle," Charleston said, as he reached for his riding crop and gloves.

Mathilde protested that dinner was to be served on the veranda and that he must stay for some *gnocci à la Romano* she had ordered especially for him, but he pleaded a pressing engagement, and left the lovers to their tête-à-tête.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CHOICE

AFTER a gay little dinner on the veranda where they had watched the sun set and the moon rise across the lake, they went up to Mathilde's room planning a moonlight walk after she had rested; Brandon sitting by her in the gathering twilight was thinking how these last days seemed to cap the climax of their life together with one more perfect joy.

Mathilde lay still, loath to break the silence that had fallen upon them like an afterglow. Presently there was a knock at the door and the maid handed Brandon a special delivery letter from Fullerton. The letter stated that the opposition which had taken on a new lease of life since Brandon's bill had passed the House, was planning some sort of coup; Kingman had been in prolonged consultation with the reactionary party leaders; and a number of senators Brandon had been counting on had grown lukewarm. If Brandon would call up Washington at once, there might be new developments, but the imperative need was for him to be on hand, to try and checkmate the opposition moves, rally his own forces, hold the wavering line.

Brandon had hardly finished reading the letter when a telegram came from Braxton, saying, as the senate would probably adjourn earlier than had been expected, he had consented, at the request of the President, if this were agreeable to Brandon, to an immediate vote on Brandon's bill.

"The plot thickens: enter the villain," was Brandon's only comment, as he handed the telegram to Mathilde.

"Call up Washington at once," she advised feverishly. "Call up Senator Fullerton and the White House. This may be one of Braxton's tricks. It sounds like him," she ended, with a little shiver.

Glad of the opportunity to get off by himself and hide his irritation from Mathilde, Brandon started down to his den. "We'll soon have this tangle unravelled," he called back cheerfully; "then for a pluperfect walk by the lake, to take the bad taste out of our mouths."

Before calling up Fullerton, Brandon sat down to dissect Braxton's wire, trying to get at its inner meaning. From long experience he had learned to attach little importance to what Braxton said. It was what he didn't say, the idea that his words were meant to conceal, that had to be got at.

"So Braxton has consented to this move at the request of the President," Brandon said to himself. "That sounds all right, as usual, on the surface; turned inside out and read backwards, it amounts to this: Kingman is Braxton's catspaw. He has taken advantage of the President's illness either to deceive him or to deceive the rest of us as to the President's attitude."

It was not difficult to trace Braxton's cunning in the move for an earlier adjournment. Undoubtedly the senior senator from Pennsylvania would prefer to have the vote on the railroad bill taken at once, in Brandon's absence.

Brandon got up suddenly, struck by a new idea. "The brute has timed this with treacherous accuracy,"

he said between his teeth. "He is counting on my not leaving Mathilde."

A knock at the door broke in upon his reflections. He tore open a telegram the maid handed him—a long day letter from the majority leader in the Senate confirming Braxton's wire, saying so much legislation had to be put through before the adjournment, which might take place earlier than had been expected, that he would consider it a personal favor if Brandon would consent to an immediate vote.

In case his bill should be defeated, and the situation was too uncertain for anyone to predict what would happen, Senator Kingman had prepared a substitute which, while it embodied the most important features in Brandon's bill, was yet so worded as to be acceptable to a number of the more conservative senators who were opposed to the original measure.

Of course, the letter went on to say, if Brandon's bill could be passed, well and good, and the sooner the vote was taken the better its chances. If, however, it did not pass, there would still be time, provided the vote was taken at once, to rally the Administration forces and pass Kingman's substitute bill, thus securing much if not all of what Brandon himself had worked for so tirelessly. Otherwise, most of the ground that had been gained, fighting inch by inch, might be lost, and some of the dangerous provisions of the Whitman bill probably would be enacted into law.

In the course of his long political career, Brandon had developed an instinct for picking his way through subterfuges. In an instant he saw that the substitute was an astute device, by means of a three-cornered fight, to offer a way of escape to a lot of senators,

who secretly wished, but did not dare, to vote against his bill.

He understood the anxiety of the party leaders, to see some kind of railway legislation passed before Congress adjourned. It undoubtedly would serve as a strong card to be played during the coming presidential campaign.

As for Kingman, if he succeeded in defeating Brandon's bill and putting across the substitute which was his bid for the presidency, the world of high finance would not be likely to overlook such a service. On the whole, Brandon reflected, there could hardly have been conceived a more astute political move for Braxton and Kingman, the reactionary leaders of their respective parties, to make at this juncture.

"I suppose there is nothing for it but to consent to an immediate vote," Brandon said to himself, trying to figure out the matter in his own mind before going back to Mathilde. "Plainly nothing could be gained now by a refusal. That would merely antagonize enough senators to defeat the bill."

After all, the only question was whether or not he himself should be on hand to lead the fight. For an instant he felt like an animal caught in a trap. Then his fighting blood began to boil. By nature Brandon was of that robust type of spirit that "rises from a threat refreshed." Opposition always quickened and inspired him, released new energies, called out fresh powers of resistance. His brain began to work rapidly on ways and means of checkmating this move. His mind conjured up all kinds of pictures and possibilities. He saw himself in the senate making a stand for his bill, turning an arc-light on the proposed substitute, showing what it really was, a last desperate attempt

on the part of big business to gain by cunning and subterfuge what it was now apparent could not be had honestly and openly, a final effort to throw dust in the people's eyes, to buy the coming election with counterfeit coin.

What a chance, he thought, to expose the hand of high finance in this whole affair, to show what men were behind this substitute measure and why they were behind it, to bring to light the secret bi-partisan understanding between Kingman and Braxton, as a concrete example of the ancient if not honorable alliance between big business and politics. He was the one man who had all the facts in the case and who could interpret those facts.

"Even at the eleventh hour," he said to himself excitedly, "there was a chance, if he were on the spot, to snatch victory from defeat. He pulled out his watch; there was almost an hour before the train left. He could easily make it. But—there was Mathilde, the uncertainty about her. Any day the child might come; or it might of course be another week. . . .

He walked up and down, trying to puzzle a way of escape out of this labyrinthine maze of difficulty. Suddenly he stopped short. All his plans, his speech, the bill itself dwindled into insignificance before a great fear that rose in his soul and clutched at his heart. He had come back to be with Mathilde, to stand guard over her, to go with her down into the valley of the shadow. His face blanched. What madness had possessed him to think he could leave her now? He rushed to the door, leaped up the steps to Mathilde's room. It seemed to him he could not get back to her fast enough, that already he had been hours away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

TO Mathilde, waiting feverishly to know the result of the conversation, it seemed that Brandon was a long time at the telephone. Finally, unable to control her impatience, she started to join him. On the landing she was seized with a sudden faintness that at first startled her by its strangeness, and then set her pulses beating madly. She went back to her room and sat down, the faintness passing as swiftly as it came, leaving her mind clear again, as when breaking clouds clear a path for the moon to illumine the night.

Over and over, on the waves of some great emotion, there had come to her a feeling that the bill was going to play a big part in her life, in the life of her son; that it might even hold the possibility of her doom.

In one lurid flash now, she saw and understood. Side by side with the coming of the bill was the coming of her hour. The fear that had possessed her that night in Washington, that the bill might take her husband from her just when she needed him most, that they would take him from her and let her die, came back to her shot with sudden meaning. To send her husband from her now, that then was the way she might win the chance to save her child, if need be, by sacrificing herself.

"If there were a question," the words of the Johns Hopkins student were ringing in her ears, "the child,

of course, must be sacrificed. There is no other way."

With her husband at hand, she knew there could be no other way. He would ward off all harm from her, as that other evening he had warded off her fears. He was so strong, he could save her from death. Ah, he must stay, her soul cried out. He was so strong, he would save her from herself, in spite of herself! Oh God, then he must go! With him away the road would be clear; the child, at least, safe!

She sank down in a little heap, a look of terror on her face. But if she think like this, his brain will catch her secret fire. He will not go, and all may be lost! With a great effort she dragged herself to the open window and drank deep of the life-giving air.

There were no longer flashes, but a steady flood of light that seemed to search out and illumine every hidden corner of her consciousness. How distinctly at last each detail stood out against the background of this growing certainty! This, then, was God's way. The bill, fatal perhaps to her, might yet save her son.

What else it might accomplish there was no time now to consider. Feeling so passionately the powerlessness of economic and social reforms to take the place of spiritual verities, to her the supreme significance of the bill lay in its power to release her son, to set free a soul who should impart a new spiritual impulse to men. For the moment the bill seemed merely a phantom bridge swung across the gulf between the seen and the unseen, a bridge over which her son should pass, following the vision that she herself had only caught in faintest outline, but which he would see in its completeness.

The hour was almost come. She would be brave to meet it. The prayer of the mother of Zebedee's chil-

dren for her sons flashed through her mind, and the answer, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup?"

With a sudden lift of the head, as if seeing One invisible, Mathilde answered, "Yea, Lord, I am able," and buried her face in her hands.

A few minutes later she heard her husband's step. She saw instantly that he had not been able "to unravel the tangle."

"We've agreed on the vote to-morrow," he announced in response to her unspoken question. "Everything considered, it's the best move to make. It's the first proposition of Braxton's that has met with my approval," he added lightly, drawing Mathilde down beside him.

She put both arms around his neck, hiding her face. "What time does your train go?"

"The train goes in less than an hour, but I shall not go. I will not leave my wife, no matter what happens to the bill. Nothing in this wide world counts now with me, but you."

Her heart leaped at his words, and as he gathered her in his arms enfolding her with his love, she yielded herself body and soul to the sheer joy of being held up, borne up, by him; the sense of his protecting presence, of his resolute strength, stealing over her like some subtle magic, driving away all fear and pain.

As she lay in his arms, a memory flashed through her mind of that other time when he had saved her, saved her from this bill that had threatened to separate her from him for a few hours one night.

She smiled softly to herself over the trivial incident, pressing her cheek against his. It had been a foolish fear, that other day; but he had stayed with her and

let the bill go! The sweetness of that hour came back to her and mingled with the triumphant joy of this.

Once again, this time in her most desperate need, he was going to stay with her, "no matter what happened to the bill." She pressed closer, that she might feel the beating of his heart against her own, and know the thrill of this moment of complete possession. Few lives could count a joy like this. Yes, he was right, what did anything matter in all the world but their love? What right had anything to come between them in this hour?

"He shall belong just to me, not to the country, not to any cause, not to God, but just to me," she kept repeating to herself, "till this agony is over, and I know what the end is to be."

So deep was she in her own thoughts she was hardly conscious of the words he was speaking. Everything seemed so trivial now, so unimportant, beside this great fact, that her husband was to stay with her and that she was safe.

"We have men we can trust in Washington," he was saying, "to fight this thing through. Fullerton and Fowler have worked as hard as I; Farnsworth and Brigham are with us now, and Slater—I still think we can count on him and Chase and Dinsmore—those five votes added to the others we are sure of ought to clinch matters. Of course there are always some who never know till the last moment on which side to jump, and Braxton is making it worth their while to jump his way. They've put the screws on Buffington. I don't feel quite sure of him; and Sherwood—it's a question whether he's got it in him to hold out against all this pressure; and Prentice and Meriwether—" he went over the names rapidly, as if calling the roll

in his own mind. "The margin is close, but they'll have to pull through without me. My post is here."

She was looking up at him, all contentment, all peace. His voice changed suddenly, as he put back a wisp of hair that had blown between him and her eyes. "I have fought like a wild beast for that bill, have done all anyone could do. A man surely may claim something for his wife,—for his child. Of course there is no danger; only one's first-born—after all these years!" He bent over and kissed her. "Dearest," he said, "I never suspected what this would mean to me. But lately all the father in me has been waking. I have been thinking of your dreams for the boy. We must help them all to come true."

The mention of her child brought her back to reality. She had been dreaming, and here was the bugle-call that summoned her to action.

As a soldier who has been sleeping on the eve of battle, at the first signal of danger springs to his feet, and fights all the harder for the rest he has taken, and for his dreamless sleep, so Mathilde, with every fiber of her being, responded to this call. All the strength she had felt in her husband seemed to pour itself into her, charging her with a vast energy, as if some electric battery had suddenly been loosed within her. The battle was on, she faced the issue alone, and she was not afraid! She knew in her soul that there never had been any question as to what she would do; only she had laid aside her armor for a little, to rest in his arms!

She sprang up, loosing his hands that held her, as though to be free from the spell of his too-near presence, and seating herself in a low chair, took both his hands in hers, holding him now with her strength,

looking up into his face, her eyes kindling as she talked, a passion of earnestness in her voice.

"Don't you see, dearest," she began very gently, "that we can't start that way; we can't hope to make our dreams for him come true by being false in the very beginning to what we know is right?

"We never should forgive ourselves if we failed in this, failed each other, failed God and little Dave. This decision of ours will be part of his heritage, part of the strength or the weakness that we shall pass on to him. He comes direct from God to us. If you should stay, if I should let you stay, and we should sacrifice the bill, little Dave would hide his face from us and we ours from him." She got up, walked over to a table where his suitcase lay, and began laying a few things in it.

Brandon drew out his watch, hesitated a moment, and then crossed to where she stood, mechanically helping her to put in the scattered things her hands were busy with.

"It isn't to be for long. You won't need much packing," she said.

"I can be back in less than thirty-six hours," he answered slowly, as if calculating every minute of the time, speaking more to himself than to her.

"That's not long; nothing, surely, can happen in thirty-six hours," he went on irresolutely, trying to convince himself of the foolishness of his fears. "Besides, you have had no signs as yet," he added more hopefully, not waiting for her answer. She caught her breath quickly, and he continued, a resolute ring in his voice. "That would settle it, of course, absolutely, there could be no shadow of a doubt if I thought, if I believed for a moment the child would

come while I was away. I would drop everything and stay." He paused, waiting for her to speak, his voice betraying the desperate struggle he was having to persuade his reason against the ready protest of his heart.

She did not answer, but went over to the mantel and took down the picture of herself he always carried in its little leather case.

Her back was turned, and he did not note the physical start nor the anguish written on her face.

"I always wanted to be there, looking on in the gallery, when you made that speech," she said, schooling her voice to the matter-of-fact tone she knew she must use now to hold the ground she had already gained.

She went on swiftly to speak of the bill, introducing a new set of images to compel his attention, subtly playing upon his imagination, drawing out his interest, deliberately diverting his mind from herself, and focusing it on the bill. "Think of the popular demand for railway reform. I don't see how Braxton can win; it's close, of course, but you have almost enough sure votes already, and some you can win yet—of those who are hesitating still. Some won't dare to vote against it"—her eyes flashed contemptuously; "conscience will make cowards of them in the end, and fear of their constituents will round up others. You can appeal to them, influence them in so many different ways. I can see you now, standing there, leading the fight, forcing a way through their heads back to their consciences, challenging their manhood, snatching victory from defeat."

He started involuntarily, and she went on, her voice vibrating, her face flushed with the excitement that

was urging her. "It will be the great hour of your life, the hour we have both been waiting for."

She saw him turn the key in his suitcase and come towards her. Then she knew she had won! She herself had opened the gates to this flood that had rushed in, sweeping away the last remnants of hesitation that held him, bearing him from her as the tide bears out to sea a craft it has loosed from its moorings. . . .

He reached out for the picture she held, and as she put it in his hand she said in a voice that had ceased its struggle to be strong, "You must wear it next your heart to-morrow, when you speak, and feel how close I am to you. This clumsy body—I shan't be holden by it from coming to you. You know my heart has wings, and flies always to where you are. Remember it can come from anywhere, from any distance, to find you."

He took her in his arms for answer, a tenderness too deep for words in his heart, and so they were silent together for a while, each stilling for the other's sake the nameless dread this parting held for both.

He took his suitcase, forced a smile as he looked back at her and was gone. She stood tense by the window until she saw him step into the car and heard its low rumble as it vanished. Then the reaction came, swift and terrible, the moral reaction and the physical. "There is still time to send for him, to catch him at the station," she thought tumultuously, as she rang the bell. When the maid appeared her husband's name was trembling on her lips, but she did not speak it. "Send instantly for—Dr. Bryce—and have Miss Hunter come at once," was what she said.

CHAPTER XXXV

TO THE UTTERMOST

UNABLE to sit quietly waiting for the nurse and doctor, Mathilde crossed the hallway into another room, and bent over a small basket fashioned out of sweet grasses by deft Indian fingers, a dainty creation, with its tiny pillow of down, its small silk quilt, caught with bits of rosebuds, and its soft white curtains, half-folded back like wings; a faint fragrance rising from it, such as the wind stirs in the heart of a violet bed. Silently she drank in the sweetness of it all, letting her hand steal over the pillow, thinking of the imprint soon to be left there by a baby head.

Taking from the hamper close by a pile of tiny garments, she spread them out before her, one by one, slipping her fingers into the sleeves and the specks of silken socks, smiling softly over the incredible smallness of them! The ivory brush with its monogram, and the powder puff to match, the white enameled pins set with tiny pearls, the bibs rounded to fit a baby chin, even the rattle with its merry chimes to wake a baby's wonder,—everything was ready, waiting.

In a rush of tenderness, she gathered the heap to her bosom, baptizing it with her tears and her love. Then, feeling a great weariness, she lay down on her bed, one hand unconsciously reaching out to rest on the basket crib. So she slept the deep sleep Nature often sends after some strain that has exhausted mind and body.

She did not stir when the nurse came, and it was not until another hour had passed that Miss Hunter, sitting by, saw her start. She looked about her for a moment, half dazed; then, in answer to the nurse's words of greeting, "You came quickly; I was very tired; I must have dropped asleep while waiting. I sent for the doctor too. Why isn't he here? What time is it? How long have I been sleeping? Oh, when did that storm come up?" she cried out, as a clap of thunder broke in fury and a trail of lightning, for a flashing moment, turned the outside darkness into light.

Her questions came quick and fast and Miss Hunter answered in a low voice that had been schooled to soothe and calm.

"I have been here over an hour. The storm came up suddenly, soon after your husband left. I came directly from the station, only stopping to send some messages for Senator Brandon, and to do this other errand for him. Shut your eyes and wait a second," she said, slipping into the hall and back again with a great box of American beauties. "He was as keen about sending you these as though he were in the first flush of his courtship days! Indeed, he almost missed his train, selecting them."

"But I don't understand; where did you see my husband?" Mathilde said, reaching out for the roses and burying her face in their fragrant depths.

"As he had only a few minutes, he stopped by in his car for me and gave me my instructions on the way to the station. I never saw a man's brain work so swiftly; he attended to an incredible number of things. He stopped at Dr. Bryce's house, left a note for him; called up Miss Ogden from the station to ask

her to come to-morrow and stay at the house while he was away, and sent a note by special messenger for your old mammy to come too. The dear old soul couldn't wait till morning. She had gone to sleep, but she got up and dressed the minute the note came, and started at once to her 'chile.' I found her here, sitting by your door, and have just persuaded her to go to bed. Then the senator wrote out a telegram for me to send to Washington," Miss Hunter went on, "naming his train, saying he would be on hand for the senate session to-morrow. As he was getting on the car he asked me to 'long-distance' Dr. Marden at Pittsburgh and see if there wasn't any possible way to induce him to come to you at once."

Mathilde started nervously. "Oh, that was so foolish. I don't want Dr. Marden. He must not come. I only want Dr. Bryce; no one is so skilful. But why isn't he here? I want to see him. I sent for him a long time ago. Where is he?" she repeated excitedly.

"He'll be here in a few minutes," Miss Hunter reassured her. "He was called out to Rockville, and will be back now any moment; and as for Dr. Marden, he told me, when I finally got him on the long-distance, that he couldn't possibly leave for several days," she added, thinking Mathilde's annoyance due to the extravagant impulse of her husband.

"To-morrow night! Yes, that is better," she agreed, as if acquiescing in Miss Hunter's conclusion.

"Mrs. Bailey's baby came yesterday," Miss Hunter announced cheerfully; "a fine boy. They are both doing splendidly. She had no trouble at all."

"How long do babies usually take to come?" Mathilde demanded, getting up. "I began feeling

strangely soon after my husband went away; that's what woke me just now—and—oh—" she caught her breath in a quick gasp, and sank into a chair, stifling a cry.

Miss Hunter went to her instantly, all alert. "I never dreamed of this," she said, looking at her watch anxiously and thinking of the doctor. "Senator Brandon never suspected anything. That means this business will soon be over," she added encouragingly, "and the baby here before we know it."

Mathilde did not answer, but sat staring before her, a white set look on her face. "Go and get Dr. Bryce at once," she commanded. "I must see him, talk with him. It's incredible he's not here," she said, putting her hands from her wildly. "And send Mammy Lou."

Miss Hunter started for the door, a fear in her heart her face did not betray. She had not told Mathilde of the accident in the suburb of Rockville, an explosion in a factory where about forty men among the night-shift had been killed and many more injured. All the doctors and nurses in the city had been hurried to the scene. She had seen the ambulances dashing past as she came from the station; the whole town was in a state of terror. That was, of course, where Dr. Bryce was. She must get him at once. Oh, why had she not sent for him before? But then, she had not dreamed of this. The senator had suspected nothing. Mathilde had evidently sent for the doctor herself, and he probably had not received her message nor the senator's note.

Miss Hunter's brain was working rapidly, as she went down the stairs. She would see the maid whom Mathilde had called, find when she had sent the message, and send the chauffeur to Rockville at once for

Dr. Bryce. She rang for the maid and the butler appeared, his usual impassive face distorted with excitement. While the maid had been telephoning some message, he supposed for Mrs. Brandon, she had heard over the wires about the explosion and gone into hysterics. It was all the cook and he and the gardener could do to get her back to her senses. It seemed her sweetheart was a foreman at the factory and the chauffeur had taken her there just as soon as he got back from the station. Miss Hunter knit her brows in perplexity over this new complication, then turning swiftly to the telephone called a taxi.

Handing the butler a line she had scribbled, she ordered him to find Dr. Bryce at Rockville, and bring him back as fast as he could speed. As she turned again to the telephone to ring up Miss Ogden, the cook and Mammy Lou appeared at the door, their black faces almost white from excitement and the horror of the night's catastrophe.

"Good Lawd, Miss, doan let dat chile know nuffin' of dis," Mammy Lou groaned, "it might bring on de pains!—Whaw!" She gave a low cry at the nurse's look, rolling her eyes and wringing her hands. "Great Gawd in Heab'n! My pore li'l chile—and Marse David done gone away!"

She brushed past Miss Hunter, who would have detained her with instructions to be calm. "Doan talk to me," she called back fiercely. "Doan I know how to act? Warn't I dar when she was bawn? An' hilt her fust in dese arms?"

At the stairs she stayed her haste, threw aside her indignation, pausing to draw a full breath, to calm herself so she might take Mathilde again in her arms, soothe her once more with their touch.

Mathilde was standing with her back to the door, an expression of terror on her face, terror of each fresh paroxysm that seized her lest it weaken her too much for speech before Charleston came.

Hearing Mammy Lou's step, she turned quickly and cried out her disappointment. "Is he *never* coming?" she demanded passionately, giving way to a fresh wave of agony that swept over her, body and soul. In another moment she put out her hand to her faithful servant, with a faint effort to smile.

"Dar now, dar now, dawlin', he's comin' befo' we kin git ready. It won't be long now and Mammy Lou's heah."

There was a caressing note in her voice, and she went on as though she were singing a lullaby. "De angels up in Heab'n is fixin' for big doin's to-night. You can mos' heah de flutt'rin' of dar wings. Doan you go botherin' 'bout Marse Charleston. It ain't him is doin' dis. 'He'll give his angels charge,' " she murmured softly, "same as He done befo', when they brung you safe down and laid you in dese arms."

"Then you took charge, Mammy dear, and you've had charge ever since." Mathilde lifted the old hand and pressed it against her cheek.

"Yes, me an' de angels togedder," she answered simply; "but when dese old han's can't hold on no longer, His angels will still be dar. Dey is always young an' strong."

Mathilde made no response, and Mammy Lou was silent, stroking her gently as she lay quiet, putting out her hands for Mathilde to grip and crush in hers, when the paroxysms came on.

Miss Hunter, stealing in softly, did not disturb Mathilde, but set quietly about arranging things in an

adjoining room, every few moments pausing to look out of the window for signs of the car. Suddenly she saw two lurid lights flashing out in the darkness, and in another instant she had slipped out of the room, down the stairs, and was holding the door open for Charleston.

She spoke swiftly. "I was very much surprised when I got here to find her in pain. You know we thought it might be a full week yet. The pains have been increasing rapidly. She has grown very excited and feverish, waiting for you; of course she has not understood the delay. I have tried several sedatives, but nothing seems to quiet her."

Charleston had thrown off his great-coat and was half way up the stairs, his bag in his hand, as she finished. "I left word for Walleck to come as soon as possible. He can't get away before another hour from that ghastly business." He spoke impatiently, almost irritably, as if his own delay in getting to Mathilde was the chief horror of this awful night. "And Senator Brandon—the butler said he had just left?"

The nurse nodded. "Wire him at once on board his train; and Marden—wire him to take the first train here."

"But—" Miss Hunter started to explain.

Charleston whirled round, his hand on Mathilde's door.

"Make it imperative, a personal request from me; sign my name, then come as quickly as possible," he commanded, his voice low and stern.

A convulsive cry rang out from Mathilde's room. Mammy Lou turned her head helplessly, saw the doctor. "Marse Charleston!" she said. "Thank Gawd!"

Mathilde did not stir. Charleston stooped down, took her wrist gently, finding her pulse, letting his free hand rest for a moment on her throbbing forehead. If only he could bear this pain for her, his heart was crying out, if only he could bear it! His cool touch and the relief she felt at his arrival seemed for a little to bring back her strength; she motioned Mammy Lou to go, and half raising herself in her eagerness, fixed Charleston with her great eyes.

"Charleston," she said, the pent-up words gushing out swift as a mountain torrent, "have you ever wanted anything with all your heart and soul, wanted it so fiercely, passionately, that the thought of not having it was worse than death to you? I have wanted a child, a son,—like that. If you knew how I have loved this child, yearned for it till I would pay any price, you would understand what I ask of you, and have the courage to grant it. If I could only tell you—but there is no time now—and I have no strength." Then, after a moment's pause: "Do you remember what I said to you one night in Columbus about the Voice speaking to me sometime through something other than happiness? That time has come; I hear the Voice speaking through this agony. Listen to me, Charleston; you and I must save this child, no matter what it costs."

He started to interrupt her, but she went on swiftly, as though fearing to lose one second of this time wrested from nature by the superhuman effort of her will. "Wait till I have finished. If there *should* be any question between his life and mine, as you would choose for me a great joy, instead of some vast agony, let my child live. Promise not to thwart me in my heart's desire. Promise me, no matter what it

costs, that you will save my child. Yes, when you have promised, I will be quiet," she said, "but not till then, not till you have promised to—save—my—child —at—any—cost."

Great drops stood on her forehead, and her breath came in quick gasps. Charleston bent over, trying to soothe her, to reason with her, to make her see the folly of such an obsession, assuring her there was no danger for herself or the child, that all would be well for both if she would just be calm. He reminded her of the countless women and children he had led safely through the valley of the shadow of birth, tried to persuade her to inhale the ether, to relax. "Mathilde," he said sternly, a look of infinite tenderness on his face, "you must not be so foolish; it will hurt the child."

"Don't talk to me like that," she cried out fiercely; "don't distort my words. I said—if there were a question." She was like one possessed. "If you will not promise, I and the child will die. If the blood of my child should be on your head, if I should wake and find him dead,"—her voice sank suddenly to a whisper. "Oh, God, why will you torture me!" She was transfixed with agony; only her eyes showed she was still conscious, still fighting for that life.

Her words shook Charleston more than all the shrieks of the dying that had rung in his ears that night; her look pierced him more cruelly than the look on the faces of those dead, as they lay, staring up at the heavens with their unseeing eyes. Realizing there was only one way to quiet her, at last, in desperation, he gave his promise.

A faint smile as of triumph passed over her face.

She fell back exhausted by the effort, and slept fitfully for several hours.

In what seemed to Charleston an incredible length of time, Walleck, his chief assistant at the hospital, arrived, having in reality torn himself from the rescue party instantly, on receiving Charleston's summons. Keyed to the highest pitch of nervous intensity by the scenes he had just left, he had dashed through the storm that raged with unabated fury, as though Nature were pouring out the vials of her wrath at this wanton destruction of her children.

Walleck's eyes were shining with an unnatural light. "Hell's let loose," was his brief greeting, as he prepared to help Charleston and Miss Hunter. "I saw Butler as you directed; he was operating at the hospital—a string of wounded—in waiting—all hands working overtime—like a scene at the front; he will come the first moment he can get away. Heart action bad," he added, his hand on Mathilde's pulse. "You have sent of course for Brandon?"

"They couldn't get any telegrams through at first," Miss Hunter explained; but they promised to get the message to the senator's train the first possible moment. That is only another one of to-night's horrors," she added with a desperate sort of calm, "he couldn't get a train back anyway before morning."

For hours Mathilde lay transfixed with agony. In the afternoon a package of telegrams sent to Brandon's train came back undelivered, with the enigmatic scrawl, "Not on the train." "That must mean he is on his way home," Miss Hunter said. But fresh complications had set in—Mathilde was slowly sinking and there was no time for superfluous comments, as doctors and nurses set silently about their task of fanning

into a fresh flame the spark of life that yet lingered in this tortured body, a spark that might still be used to light the torch of life for that other soul.

After they had fought the whole day and late into the night, with all the weapons science has forged, they faced each other, dumb and powerless in the presence of the overshadowing mystery of human life, of human helplessness. Butler was the first to speak. His voice sounded dry and beaten. The fantastic thought was in all their minds. Death was drunk with power; it was hopeless to try and cope with it, this night that it had scored so many victories.

"There seems no longer any hope for her—the Cæsarean operation"—he hesitated, looking into Charleston's stern set face—"For the child there might be that one chance."

"We will take it," Charleston answered, and the words were more terrible to him than could have been his own death warrant.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Miss Hunter, opening it, started as though she had seen an apparition.

"Dr. Marden!" Walleck exclaimed, springing forward and straightening himself like a soldier saluting, while the others instinctively made way for him. Charleston looked up and nodded gravely. It would not have seemed strange to him in that hour if all the laws of nature had been broken and some stupendous miracle had been wrought to save Mathilde.

As he unpacked his instruments, Marden explained briefly why he had refused to come at first. He had not understood the name over the long-distance—did not realize this was the case Charleston had written about, until he got the wire from Charleston and

another from Senator Brandon en route for Washington. Then he had just caught the express.

"Ever since those days in Paris," he said to Charleston, "I have been waiting for an opportunity to do you some service. This was my first chance," he ended abruptly, switching his mind on to the business in hand, as he bent over Mathilde, taking in every detail with his practised eye, weighing the scales of life and death in the balance.

"Cæsarean incision?" Charleston questioned.

"The only hope now. There is still a fighting chance for the child, if we can keep her alive," he answered, motioning Butler, Walleck and Miss Hunter to follow him into the next room, giving swift directions to them all.

As Charleston knelt alone by Mathilde, there was a rapt look on his face, and his lips moved as if in prayer. In truth the words he spoke were a prayer of his spirit, to her spirit.

"Mathilde," he called in a voice so low it seemed a whisper, and yet filled the room with its intensity; "Mathilde, can you hear the Voice? It is speaking to you now. You must come back, come back and save your child. You and I must save the child, no matter what it costs."

Presently a flicker of consciousness lit her face. Charleston, with his hand on her pulse, felt an almost imperceptible flutter, as though his words had touched some hidden spring in the secret places of her soul.

At intervals during the time that Dr. Marden worked, and Butler and Walleck administered oxygen, Charleston kept repeating, "Come back, Mathilde, and save your child. You must come back to save the child."

Finally his words began to echo heavily as though her spirit were too far away to heed. There was a light on her face nevertheless, as if she were still listening, but it seemed to Charleston that she was hearkening to another Voice!

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHECKMATE

ON the train the morning after he left home, Brandon, immersed in senate documents, was startled by a terrific crash, as if the engine had been hurled against a granite wall. After the first shock there was no more disturbance; in a few minutes the cars were emptied; everyone was rushing forward for a look at the locomotive that had been derailed by an open switch. Relieved that the accident was not serious, people plied the crew and each other with the usual questions as to the cause of the trouble, the time necessary to make repairs, the prospect of getting a wreck train and making up time.

Brandon looked about, trying to get his bearings. The engine could hardly have chosen a more isolated spot to leave the track—a desolate stretch of country in the Pennsylvania foothills, with a straggling wood on one side of the road, a rocky field on the other, and apparently no human help or habitation at hand.

A pompous-looking individual joined Brandon and began blustering his wrath, expatiating on the inconvenience this delay would cause him. He was a busy man, couldn't afford to flounder around in this way; he had important engagements in New York; the firm he represented expected a man to arrive on time. It was a rotten shame railroads couldn't run their business better.

Brandon acquiesced absent-mindedly and walked on. He had more important use for his wits just then, than to match impotent words with this stranger. Passing by the locomotive, he overheard the engineer say to a fireman, "I guess this delay won't cost anyone his job." The man whistled enigmatically as he moved off, and Brandon, conscious only of his own irritation, gave the matter no more thought.

In the midst of the disgruntled crowd one man at least was able to take a philosophical view of the situation, a young military aviator who was going with his aeroplane to the Langley aviation field. A group of curious passengers had gathered round him at the baggage car. "If you can't ride, fly; that's my motto," he observed amiably, as with the help of some bystanders he began dragging out boxes containing the parts of his machine.

Brandon, pacing up and down the road, came to an abrupt halt in front of the engineer. "This is rotten luck. How long will it take to get another engine to pull us out of this hole?"

"A brakeman has gone to wire for a wreck train. Nothing can be done till it comes. We ought to get into Washington by five o'clock—not before." He emphasized the last words as though repeating an order.

As Brandon walked off, trying to puzzle some way out of the difficulty, the sight of the aeroplane being assembled in the field gave him a sudden inspiration. Stepping up to the aviator, he handed him his card.

"Some miracle has got to be worked to get me to Washington by two o'clock this afternoon. I should say your business was working miracles. Can you manage a passenger?"

The man's face flushed with pleasure as he read Brandon's card. "Judson is my name, sir; William Judson. I was proud to support you in your race for the senate. We'll have another race now, that will land you in Washington again," he added.

Brandon shook his hand warmly. "If you land me this time, the opposition will feel worse than when I was first returned. They'd give a lot to have me out of the way to-day."

Without wasting time in further talk, Judson went on with his work. In a short while, assisted by the engineer, the fireman, and as many bystanders as could worm a finger into the business, he had the machine ready for its flight.

Brandon stepped into his seat. Several men held the aeroplane while Judson turned over the propeller. The motor began to whirr. Judson turned his visor back from his forehead and gave the word to let go.

The machine bumped along the rough ground for a few moments, then with spread wings, like a sea-gull that has grown tired of earth and sights a ship on the far horizon, lifted itself into the air. Brandon raised his hat. The crowd waved and cheered until the fragile craft with its human freight became only a black speck against the sky-line, and at last was lost to view.

Judson sat with his hand on the wheel, every nerve alert. Brandon settled back in his seat, trying to accustom himself to the strange sights and sensations that were a part of this adventure. Suddenly his thoughts reverted to the earth. The engineer's remark flashed into his mind. He gave an involuntary start. Could it be possible it was a "put-up job," that in order to keep him out of Washington they had deliber-

ately had his train derailed? "When they hear what I have to say, they will wish they had had it dynamited," he said to himself grimly.

The exhilaration of his flight through the air, the thrill at the idea of thwarting the plans of the opposition in this dramatic way, the emotional strain of parting from Mathilde, all combined to key Brandon's feelings up to a strange pitch of intensity.

The advent of Judson at the critical moment reminded him of ancient tales of Jehovah intervening to deliver his servants out of the hands of their enemies. The idea started a novel train of thought in his mind, unloosing a fresh set of emotions. A new dimension seemed to open up, an expansion to take place in his consciousness, as though he were entering some unknown inner realm, where to his surprise he appeared to feel at home just as, strangely enough, he was beginning to feel at home in this kingdom of the air.

"After one has conquered a difficulty, strange how it dwindles in retrospect," he mused. "One sees an obstacle ahead, out of all perspective; it waits to overwhelm him. Looking back, after he has passed beyond it, or over it, or through it, it shrinks to such insignificance he wonders how his imagination could ever have tricked him into thinking it so large and fearful. And so with the things we have accomplished; once done they seem to settle down to their right proportions. The miracle we fancied we were working turns out to be only a part of the day's work, something we could always have done quite easily if we had only realized the power that was in us to do it. The real miracle, as Mathilde often said, is our waking up to know, to believe in our power within—getting a divine faith—

and confidence in it; the achievement follows easily, almost inevitably.

"After all," he thought, "man's creative intelligence had only to awaken to enable him to possess the kingdom of the air, his spirit has only to awaken to enable him to enter the kingdom of heaven." The whole of life, if one could grasp it, was in that little phrase about the kingdom of heaven being within, which Mathilde loved, the truth and beauty of which she had laid hold on, not so much with her intellect as with her heart and soul, her feeling nature. "Like her," he thought, "one must *feel,* not reason, one's way into the kingdom." "Well, she would teach him to feel, to find his way—she and the little child would lead him!

The thing he had to do seemed suddenly lifted on to another plane. A power he had not taken into account was involved in all this business. He was not responsible for the outcome. He was simply being used to help forward a plan greater than he had dreamed. A plan that could not be defeated or thwarted, because it was infinitely larger than the men who stood for it or the men who stood against it.

Out of the thought came an influx of confidence, a calm assurance that no matter what the opposition did, this power was going to use him now to carry forward its plan—achieve its purpose. . . .

About two o'clock, Brandon, spying out the land with a field-glass, sighted in the distance a white spire that looked like a giant needle with the thread of a river run through it. "Is it possible," he exclaimed, "the monument and the Potomac?"

Judson nodded. A few minutes later he cut off the motor. The aeroplane began to swing about in wide circles, each time coming nearer the earth. The monu-

ment and the buildings grew bigger and more inposing. Soon he and Brandon would be looking up at their great heights.

"I never thought I should be gazing down on the monument like this, and descending on the capital from the high heavens," Brandon laughed. "One needs a new vocabulary to express the emotions that go with flying. This truly has been my most exciting race for the senate. I hope you will stay over and see the fight this afternoon. I can promise you plenty of excitement," he added, admiring the skilful way in which Judson manipulated the machine, so responsive to his slightest touch.

Judson assured Brandon nothing could keep him away, that he had until morning to get to Langley Field.

"And won't you dine with me to-night? No, I forgot; that must be for another time; I go back this afternoon. I only wish the return trip could be as swift and agreeable as this. You have given me one of the sensations of my life."

"The next thing on the program is to give Braxton a sensation," Judson laughed, as the machine came down to earth. Some children gathering violets in the White Lot and a few loafers on the benches were the only ones to witness their arrival.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE SKIRMISH

IN another minute Brandon, who had hailed a passing taxi, was whirling up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. Slipping in by a side entrance, he went to his committee-room, where he found Wadlin, his secretary, in a state bordering on panic.

"How in heaven's name did you get here? Where did you drop from?" he demanded. "I called up the station a half hour ago to see if your train was on time: they said there had been an accident that would delay you four or five hours."

"So there was, but I came by aeroplane," Brandon laughed. "If my sky pilot, William Judson, turns up this afternoon, show him every courtesy. He saved the day. He can tell you and the newspaper boys the story. This time they won't have to draw on their imaginations for copy. Now for business!"

"No wire from Wildwood?" he asked sharply. Wadlin shook his head, pushing toward him a pile of letters and telegrams, duly tabulated and blue penciled, according to their relative importance.

"What's going on now on the floor?" Brandon demanded, whirling round. "Is Fullerton there? Good. Send for him at once. We have no time to lose."

Brandon scribbled a few lines, sealed the envelope, and while Wadlin rang for a messenger, continued his running fire of questions.

"Whom have they won over? How many votes are we still sure of? Who are doubtful? Has Kingman introduced his substitute?"

Wadlin waited until the volley had subsided, then took up the points in rapid succession, putting Brandon in possession of the situation to date. There was some routine business to be got through, after which the vote was to be taken, probably within an hour. The President's reputed acceptance of the Kingman substitute had caused a stampede. Beatson, Dunne, Slater, and the rest who had lined up with Brandon only because they did not dare to vote openly with Braxton against so popular a measure, had hailed the Kingman substitute as a way of escape out of their troubles, a solution of the problem which was the paramount issue of their political lives, how to carry water on both shoulders—serve two masters—eat their gingerbread and keep it.

Brandon began turning the keys on his ring fiercely, a sign of impatience that Wadlin recognized. Cutting out further comment, he concluded: "Kingman acting with Braxton has persuaded these men, who hold the balance of power, to assassinate your bill. After it is defeated, the Braxton forces will furnish enough votes to pass the substitute bill."

Brandon uttered an exclamation and without further comment turned to his telegrams, devoting his attention to them while waiting for Fullerton.

In the senate, as Fullerton read Brandon's note, the first impulse of relief at his arrival was succeeded by a feeling of regret that Brandon would be present to witness the defeat of his bill which it now seemed was a foregone conclusion.

On his way to the senate office building, Fullerton

was thinking of the underground work and the underhanded methods to which the opposition had resorted in its determination to defeat the bill at any cost. He thought of the wonders that might be worked if only there were a set of men in the senate, as powerful and astute as the Braxton crowd, leagued together to serve the public with the same single-hearted purpose with which those others served the system. But there was at least a nucleus, he said to himself, as he got out of the elevator, a beginning of a new order, in the group that stood with Brandon. Strong men they were, and Brandon as a debater and fighter did not have his peer on the floor.

Fullerton recalled the scene in the senate a few years back, when Brandon had delivered his maiden speech, and the ultra conservatives on both sides of the house had filed out, in token of their contempt for the new member and his ideas. He remembered how Brandon had waited a few moments while the exodus was taking place, and then thundered that prophetic phrase: "Seats that are being voluntarily vacated today, will be vacated involuntarily within the next few years."

The prophecy had already been dramatically fulfilled, Fullerton mused, as he thought of a half-dozen of those same seats now occupied by men more or less sympathetic to Brandon. There was needed only a little more time, a little more enlightenment of public opinion, a few more scandals like the defeat of Brandon's bill and the passing of that anæmic substitute measure, to rouse the country to action.

As soon as Brandon heard Fullerton's knock, he sprang forward, and the two plunged into the business

before them, the senior senator from Florida confirming Wadlin's report.

"What is the sugar coating of this substitute that makes it slip down everybody's throat?" Brandon demanded.

"The substitute is nothing more nor less than a counterfeit of your bill. It purports to offer organized labor and the public important concessions, while in reality it plays into the hands of the railroads at every turn. For instance, the powers of the Interstate Commerce Commission are ostentatiously enlarged in matters of small consequence, but quietly curtailed in matters of outstanding importance. The method of computing railroad valuations for rate-making purposes, which, of course, is the paramount issue, is practically the same as in the robber clauses of the Whitman bill. Labor is given the right to strike within certain limits. Obviously it will be entirely possible to contract those limits later by a court decision or legislation. Also labor is granted a share in all profits above seven per cent, it being a simple matter by the familiar devices of frenzied finance, to prevent all profits above seven per cent.

Brandon smiled grimly: "On the principle of the Scotch landlord's sign—'To prevent guests from taking fruit from the table, there will be no fruit.' "

"Taken all in all," Fullerton continued, "there could hardly have been conceived a more adroit way out of the hole into which the opposition found itself forced, by the popular sentiment in favor of railway reform.

"We must admit it was a clever stroke," Brandon agreed, "to get an administration senator to father that bastard bill. Kingman's marriage with Pauline Whitman is already bearing fruit!"

"Of course it would never do," Fullerton went on, "for Braxton and the other out and out reactionaries to show their hand by openly advocating Kingman's bill. That would arouse suspicion at once, probably damn it. Braxton apparently is violently opposed to the Kingman substitute, but in order to advertise it as a popular measure, great stress is laid on the fact that some of Braxton's stand-bys have deserted Whitman's bill for the Kingman bill, in order to save their political lives. That sort of talk has a great effect on a certain type of mind, surrounds the substitute bill with a kind of halo. It is subtlety carried to the last degree. With Kingman and other administration senators, beating the drums and blowing the horns at the head of the procession, a lot of stragglers and irresolutes have fallen into line."

"Their game is clear," Brandon summed up between impatient puffs at his cigar, "the preposterous scale of values the roads are determined to force upon Congress, through either the Whitman or the Kingman bill, would mean a gain for them and a loss to the people, of what would be equivalent to a colossal war indemnity of billions of dollars. They are playing for more than royal stakes, these modern kings of finance, and will hesitate at no Machiavellian villainy. But in spite of the ground they seem to have gained, I believe we shall break their power to-day."

For a moment Brandon's excitement had the upper hand, but he calmed down instantly. "You had better go back to the senate," he said, "I will stay here till you send for me. When the Vice President is ready to put the vote, get the floor, and when I enter, yield it to me. I shall make an exposure of this substitute bill that will compel a lot of senators either to line up

with us, or to walk the plank at the next election. No man shall be allowed to go into this business blindfolded, or take a wild leap in the dark. I'll light up the precipice, show them and the country what they are headed for."

Fullerton went back to the senate, inspired by a new emotion. He had caught the contagion of Brandon's spirit. He was ready for any miracle. As he took his seat and began sorting the papers on his desk, his blood was tingling with the excitement of the coming combat. "Who knows," he said to himself, while by unanimous consent the calendar was being called for unobjected bills, "who knows what the next hour will bring forth?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE SYSTEM IS COMPLACENT

MEANWHILE the program of the railroad crowd appeared to be moving forward without a hitch. Braxton sat back in his chair, calm and imperturbable, no sign on his impassive face of the satisfaction he felt at the turn affairs had taken.

Others who had less at stake were less careful to conceal their elation. Goldberg and Armstrong standing by the door, were chatting hilariously together, and the bland face of Senator Beatson of South Dakota was wreathed in smiles. Always on the watch to see which way the political winds were blowing, Beatson, puffing and perspiring, had jumped on the band-wagon just as it was starting on its triumphal march.

As he sat complacently twirling his thumbs, he meditated on the pleasing way of escape offered by the substitute measure, from the wrath of an outraged constituency. At a critical moment in his career, it had appeared in the political firmament like a rainbow of hope. While not in the least interfering with the pleasant and profitable relations he so long had sustained with the system, his vote for the Kingman bill would leave him free vociferously to advocate railway reconstruction, maintaining the pose he had assumed five years before, when a popular wave in favor of railway reform had swept over his state and borne him

—converted overnight—into the United States Senate.

William Belknap, head of the banking house of Belknap and Morton, the most powerful financial factor in America, looked down over the senate chamber from his seat in the gallery and shivered slightly as his eye rested on the corpulent form of the junior senator from South Dakota. Belknap was by nature fastidious, and it went against his grain to be obliged to have even indirect dealings with a man of Beatson's type.

He turned with a sigh of relief to Senator Buffington, sitting a few seats away from Beatson. Erect, alert, full of youth and power, it was a satisfaction to know he was safe at last; he would be very useful in time to come. He noted Braxton talking to him, "General Manager of the United States," the newspapers had been calling Braxton of late, referring to the control he was supposed to exercise over pending legislation.

However, Braxton was getting old, Belknap said to himself, as he watched the two men. He had managed this railroad business most adroitly, but they soon would have to be looking about for a different type of man to take his place. The time was past when such out-and-out advocates of special privilege as Braxton, Devoe, and Whitman could openly be sent to the senate as representatives of predatory wealth. Recent searching investigations into every branch of industry, oil scandals, railroad probes, pure food agitation, had had the effect of putting the public on its guard, making it quick to sense transactions between big business and politics.

What the public demanded was a general house cleaning, indeed, a cleaning out of both Houses. This

demand, Belknap reflected, ought to be attended to at once. The system, obliging and adept, should be the first to cater to this new taste for cleanliness by politically chloroforming its old servitors and replacing them by ambitious and talented young politicians who gradually could be prostituted. Belknap glanced over the chamber, mentally marking for destruction several of his veterans.

Naturally the most promising material for these highly responsible posts was to be found among men who already had won the confidence of the people, who were not branded with the usual hall-marks of the political tool. The popular senator from New Jersey was just such a man. Young, vigorous, able, he had a long life before him; he was good for many terms in the senate, good for the supreme court later on, good for almost anything.

Belknap leaned forward, studying Buffington intently. He noted that his face was pale and a trifle drawn. He had not yielded without a struggle. They had been forced to use a lot of tact to land him. Belknap groaned within himself to think what delicate handling had been required in order to line him up on the vital issue of railroad valuation, while leaving him in nominal possession of most of his high-flown theories on other subjects. But the next time it would come easier, Belknap knew; each succeeding time it would be easier for Buffington to do their bidding, until finally it became a habit.

The next senator to engage Belknap's attention was Benjamin Brown, whom the system had discovered fifteen years ago in a small town in Wyoming. Brainy, unscrupulous, ambitious, unknown, splendid material in the raw—he had been a find, and his case had been

well managed from the start. Brown's history, mused Belknap, was typical. He had begun life as a brakeman, had studied law at night, hung out his shingle, and done some useful work for the railroads; they had pushed him along, made him county attorney, sent him to the lower house in the legislature, and later to the state senate, whence he had been appointed here to fill an unexpired term. Accidents killed some brakemen and made U. S. senators of others, Belknap reflected. He smiled to himself; the American people liked nothing better than to see a self-made man forge to the front. It flattered their national pride, made them believe there was always a chance for a *man* in America, and for honest worth!

He thought how they had rung the changes on this, in the career of old Peter Kimball, for ten years Speaker and autocrat of the House. Honest Abe and Uncle Pete had almost come to be companion pieces in the gallery of American immortals! Each had been born in a log cabin. Each was a self-made man. That was enough. The contrast between Lincoln breaking a people's shackles, and Kimball helping to forge financial fetters for a new generation, had failed to strike the public mind.

Belknap's thoughts ambled on pleasantly, while some routine business went forward. He was thinking many things to himself, that he would not have cared to think out loud. There was nothing the system liked better than to get hold of a struggling young man of talent, and give him a start, always of course with the understanding that his talents henceforth should be used exclusively in the interest of the interests. Belknap mentally passed in review the army of

clever young men who had risen to affluence in their employ.

The system required practical men, with their feet on the ground, and no idealistic nonsense in their heads. Short work was made of those who tried to pit their paltry strength against the higher powers. They were crushed out or starved out, unobtrusively but expeditiously. Moreover, these "business methods" worked admirably all along the line; in politics, in journalism, in the universities, in the courts, even in the church, where pliable young men were advanced and recalcitrant ones were blocked.

Taken all in all, everything considered, the organization was in good running order; satisfactory service, no friction, wheels turning smoothly. Belknap straightened his shoulders and looked down at the floor of the chamber where he was not allowed to set foot. And yet it was he, he mused, who was master of this house!

He remembered having read in one of his rare old editions of English history, how an obliging parliament in the reign of Henry VIII had passed a law abolishing public opinion. He recalled that parliament in the time of Louis XIV had existed merely to register the king's decrees. At times, witness the case of Brandon's bill, which was about to be defeated,—the Senate of the United States seemed to exist solely to carry out the decree of a little coterie of men of whom he, Belknap, was the head. The will of the people!—he smiled contemptuously—it was *his* will that was law in the land!

Brandon, of course, was a constant irritant; it was providential that, for the time being, he was effectually disposed of. Had he been present, he would have

made a stiff fight for his bill, probably would have won back, by sheer force of his personality, some of his defaulting supporters, and given the opposition an uncomfortable half-hour. There was never any telling what Brandon might do.

Belknap was thankful this last scheme to side-track him had succeeded better than the plan to send him as ambassador to England, after they had failed to shelve him as the vice-presidential nominee. One would have thought a post like that would have suited a man of his tastes, that his wife would have been keen for the Embassy. The system had learned to count heavily on the ambition of wives; usually that was a strong card to play.

A capital ambassador Brandon would have made. "I'd like to see him landed in Pekin," Belknap muttered. However, it answered all practical purposes that at that moment he was held in the fastnesses of the Blue Ridge mountains.

Belknap took out a telegram and read over the message: "Train No. 40 P.L.N. delayed four hours. Impossible arrive Washington before five p.m."

Glancing at his watch, he smiled significantly; it was just two-thirty. The vote was to be taken within an hour. The railroads and the telegraph companies also did his bidding!

CHAPTER XXXIX

PRO PATRIA

AFTER Fullerton had gone, Brandon stood for a long time looking out of the window past the Capitol grounds, through masses of green trees and flowering shrubs, to the city, half hid in her trailing garments of spring. Far off he caught glimpses of white buildings that seemed like huge blossoms among the trees.

To the west, at the point where the silver thread of the Potomac separates the city of the living from the city of the dead, the white shaft of the monument lifted itself out of the green earth, like a lily in its stainless purity and grace, fit emblem of those ideals of liberty which had taken root in the virgin soil of this new land, and blossomed forth in the free institutions of a great Republic, in which the People ruled!

Some such thought crossed Brandon's mind, for he wheeled about presently, clenching his fist. "Free institutions," he muttered, "and this Capitol, set on a hill to be a beacon light, a temple of the sovereign people, where their will is embodied into law; how has its glory departed!"

There came to him a vision of that other House, not made with hands, which the Fathers of the Republic had builded in their dreams, the sanctuary of their ideals and aspirations—America, a place of shelter for the oppressed of the whole world, the Holy of Holies

among the nations! What was it they were trying to do, across in the senate chamber, the astute leaders of the "chosen representatives of the people," but betray them, and barter away their rights, trampling their will under foot? He thought how securely the money power had entrenched itself in the seats of the mighty; how it had gradually come to pass that a handful of unscrupulous men controlled the destinies of over one hundred million free Americans!

The horror of it swept over him afresh. There was need for patriots now. In this hour of her extremity, his country called to him. All that was within him thrilled and hearkened to that call. Not to respond would be treason!

And it was Mathilde who had sent him; if it had not been for her, he would have stayed. He would make the speech of his life, he said to himself, do all in his power to snatch victory from defeat, and then go back to her.

He strode up and down in his excitement, his thought of the bill mingling for an instant with one swift, exultant thought of her, associated so subtly with him in this speech which was to cap the climax of his career. He pictured the relief of his friends at his dramatic entrance, the consternation of the opposition to find the tables turned at the last minute. He had a feeling that everything was combining to play into his hands.

So every hindrance had helped. There had been supplied just the needed touch of treachery to rouse him to his best effort. His enemies had furnished the oil necessary to turn the slow fire of his wrath into a consuming flame. They had not known—well, later they would know; and *she* would know; he would be

telling her. He looked at his watch. He could make his speech easily, vote, and catch the afternoon train back to Wildwood.

He stood tense, alert, every nerve alive and throbbing, like a soldier waiting for the word to fire, or a gladiator panting to enter the arena!

There was a knock at the door. He sprang forward, thinking it Fullerton's summons. A page handed him a telegram. He tore it open impatiently, his mind so intent on his own thoughts that he resented any interruption. He read Charleston's message twice, before even a suspicion of its meaning penetrated his brain.

"Come instantly. Grave complications; heart action growing steadily weaker, oxygen being administered. Butler and Walleck here, Marden expected. Everything humanly possible being done. Have been expecting you all day—cannot understand why wires sent to your train failed to reach you. Unconscious. Fear question of few hours." The words kept repeating themselves mechanically in his ear, like some idle echo. He heard them as a man stunned by a fatal fall hears the low comments of the surgeons bending over him, and stares into their grave faces, unconscious of any pain, of any meaning in their words.

"Mathilde, Mathilde!"—the name came dumbly to his lips—the cry rose silent in his heart. Mercifully, in that hour he could not conjure up the picture of Mathilde as dying. Vivid creature that he loved, she was too full of life for death! He looked about him stupidly, then slowly began to realize where he was, why he was there; she had sent him—sent him to make the speech!

The idea of his speech seized upon him like an obses-

sion, possessing his mind, setting fire to his brain. She had wanted him to make this speech, and there was time to make it before the train left. It was the one thing he could do for her. He sprang to his feet, a strange light on his face, a great resolve in his soul. He would speak for her. He would go in the strength that was yet his, that would still be his, for a little, till the slow poison of this message had wrought its deadly work of torture and despair.

He flung open the door and stood looking down the corridor. Why was there this delay? In God's name why did they not send for him? If they would only send for him at once, before realization should come to strike him dumb, he could do her bidding, make the speech. He reasoned out the matter, as a man who watches his life-blood ebbing from him, calculates how long life will last, and sets about some fragment of work that must be finished before the end.

As he paced up and down the committee-room, his hands clenched behind his back, his face set and drawn, his rigid figure seemed like some automaton that had been wound up and could not stop. His brain, strangely clear, was working with a swift precision, as though it too had been set going by some mysterious force. As he walked, his speech began to frame itself, a speech of which he had not dreamed. Ideas hitherto half-formed in his mind sprang into full being, taking shape in swift moving sentences, while seething thoughts hot from his brain poured themselves into forms of molten beauty. And over all, the spirit of Mathilde seemed to brood, permeating every fiber of his being, herself the secret spring, the hidden source of the speech he was to make, in defense of the bill for which she had sent him from her.

He sank into a chair by the window, his eyes turned again toward the city, which swam now before him, one vast blur on the horizon. The voices that had been ringing in his ears had suddenly ceased—the Voice of the People—all earth's voices were hushed in a strange stillness, the Voice of God Himself struck dumb!

One voice only rose out of the vast silence, one image out of the void, the voice of Mathilde, and her face, as he had seen her last. The words she had spoken came back to him, clear and triumphant, "You know my love has wings. It lights always where you are. Remember, it can come from any distance, from anywhere, to find you."

Instinctively the man rose. So she had come and found him here! She would be with him; she would speak through him. In the power of that vision he would go. The strength of her spirit should be made perfect in the weakness of his flesh.

There was a knock at the door. A page entered, handed him a message from Fullerton. Without a word Brandon followed the boy down the corridor, a crumpled yellow telegram still clenched in his hand.

CHAPTER XL

SENATE BILL NO. 1915

BRANDON waited by the door while Kingman finished his remarks in regard to the substitute bill, and enlarged on the imperative need for a reform of the transportation system of the country. Keenly aware of the flagrant abuses from which the public had suffered, the conservative leaders of both parties, he insisted, were in earnest sympathy with the demand for this much needed reform, and confidently hoped the senate would come to the rescue of the country, not by any impractical or extreme measure, since a false step at this critical juncture would upset business conditions and paralyze industries which formed the warp and woof of the nation's prosperity, but by some such comprehensive action as that contemplated in the bill which had been offered as a substitute for the Brandon bill. This substitute, he went on to explain, sought to harmonize the interests of the railroads, the employees, and the traveling and shipping public, and to restore an efficient and practical railroad régime, by doing away with the chaotic conditions prevailing in a government system, hampered and almost overwhelmed, it was true, by unparalleled war burdens, but constitutionally incapable, even in normal times, of efficiently running a colossal and complicated network of railways.

As Kingman sat down, the Vice President an-

nounced: "The question is upon the motion of Senator Kingman to strike out the original bill and to insert his substitute." Instantly Fullerton was on his feet, and was recognized by the Vice President. Fullerton began in his deliberate manner. No one paid much attention to what he was saying. He could not affect matters one way or the other now.

Quietly Brandon entered the chamber, and slipped into a seat by the door. Fullerton sat down. Almost before anyone was aware of his presence, Brandon rose and was recognized by the Vice President.

A wave of consternation passed over the senate. The whole atmosphere became charged with suppressed excitement; even the galleries felt the suspense, though they did not understand its cause.

Brandon stood silent for a moment, then began speaking in a low, vibrant voice, that thrilled his hearers with some subtle quality of feeling behind his words. Presently he threw back his head and spoke more swiftly.

Belknap leaned over the railing in his excitement, his face purple with rage, while reporters in the press gallery fell upon their copy in feverish haste to reproduce for the benefit of the public the dramatic situation. Everybody was on the alert to see what would come next.

Brandon had proved his power as a speaker on many occasions, but to-day, above the art of the orator and the kindling zeal of the apostle of the new freedom, there was an added something, an intense feeling, enveloping him as it were in an atmosphere of light, as though he were possessed himself and would possess his hearers with a sense of the reality of some vision he had caught.

The personality of the man seemed to emit a kind of moral force, a spiritual fire, which not only roused his followers to fresh enthusiasm, and kindled a glow of fervor in the hearts of some who before only half-heartedly had favored the bill; but actually invaded the ranks of the opposition, as some wave of flame, sweeping across the prairie, gathers strength as it goes, finally subduing even the opposing winds to its will.

Braxton's face showed no sign of the volcanic emotions seething within, as he noted the effect on the Senate of Brandon's exposure of the real purpose of the Kingman substitute, his scathing analysis of the motives of men who could consent to be a party to such a compromise, in order to trick the people and curry favor with the system. Every word, as it went whirring by, struck some vulnerable spot in the opposition defenses.

"Democracy," he thundered, "is a religion. It stands for organized righteousness in government. The most pernicious enemies of democracy, however, are not its open and honest opponents, but those tricksters who seek to betray the people by slipping provisions into remedial measures, which either render those measures inoperative, or render their operation ineffectual. Let us make no mistake. The real danger to popular government lies in the Judas kiss of its professed friends, with the catchwords of democracy on their lips, perfidious legislative jokers in their hands, the passports to plutocratic favor in their pockets, and treason to the people in their hearts.

"Gentlemen of the senate, I am not speaking to-day as I sometimes speak, in behalf of mere abstract principles, nor yet as the champion of some poor tottering cause. I am speaking in the name of at least two-

thirds of the voters of America, who believe in, and who demand at your hands, fundamental railroad reorganization based upon economic justice. We are all aware that there can be no satisfactory solution for our other great industrial problems until our railroad problem is solved. The bill before this chamber offers a chance for us to take a seven-leagued stride toward setting the business of this country free from those transportation conditions which in the past have made monopoly not only possible but in a sense easy and natural.

"If we continue to allow American industry to be run on the short-sighted basis of every man for himself, a head-on collision is inevitable between a would-be autocracy of capital and a would-be autocracy of labor. Our only hope of avoiding this cataclysm lies in the substitution of the principle of partnership or coöperation between capital, labor, and the general public, for that of industrial autocracy, class war and economic conquest.

"Possibly some members of this body may cherish the illusion that the financial interests in America are all powerful, that one cannot afford to act counter to the will of big business. I say to you, and you know I speak the truth; you cannot with impunity ignore the mandate of an aroused people conscious of its power and demanding that 'we shackle cunning, as our fathers shackled force.'

"If not as statesmen and patriots, then as politicians, I ask you to consider well, before you assassinate this bill, and attempt to palm off in its stead, the Kingman substitute which I have demonstrated to this body, and which if passed, will demonstrate itself to the country at large, to be—*a counterfeit measure, that betrays*

every right it pretends to protect, and belies every principle it claims to invoke."

At this point Braxton motioned Whitman to join him in the cloakroom, for a hurried consultation. Alone with his colleague, he made no effort to conceal his excitement and chagrin. "I don't know where the man dropped from, or what's got into him. He's a demon for audacity. He's recaptured his own crowd and lassoed some of ours. You can see it, you can feel it," he said between his teeth. "It's all over with us, unless by some miracle we can hold up the vote until the effect of Brandon's clap-trap dies down. That would give us a chance to get in some counter-strokes," he went on excitedly, "and bring fresh pressure to bear on the panicky ones. Kingman or one of his crowd is sure to pull off the nomination. That being the case, the only safe policy for members of his party would be to stand with him, against this firebrand, whose political days are numbered."

There was no doubt in Braxton's mind—the system would make a speedy end of Brandon, wiping off the political map, if not off the face of the earth, this man who so often had blocked its game. The system was the one divinity to which Braxton bowed. To his mind it was all-powerful, held the keys of political and financial life and death.

Suddenly three newspaper men dashed past in a state of tremendous excitement.

"What in hell has happened?" Braxton called after them.

One of them stopped long enough to throw back an answer. "Brandon's wife is dying, and they say he knows."

The men rushed on, eager to turn into copy all the

dramatic incidents of the past hour. It was not often a story like that came one's way.

Braxton's heart gave one leap. He and Whitman looked at each other, the same thought in both their minds. This then was their opportunity, the chance to head off the vote and allow people to get from under the spell Brandon had cast over them. Braxton whisked out his note book and the two feverishly set to work drafting a motion.

In a few minutes they were back in their seats, Braxton waiting, like some bird of prey, for Brandon to be done.

Brandon was just finishing.

"Gentlemen of the Senate, this contest looms large on our horizon, because we are in the midst of it. But in time to come, as we look back, we shall regard it merely as one of the points of rising ground which mark the highway along which humanity is making its slow but resistless way up to the difficult steeps of progress. This bill is but an incident in a vast program of economic reconstruction. As we look ahead, we may catch a vision that will lift us above the plane of tawdry personal ambition, into the exhilarating air of patriotic purpose and achievement.

"We are summoned to enlist not merely for one battle against political bosses and industrial tyrants, but in a war that can never cease until we have freed ourselves from the spirit and the system which produces bossism and tyranny. But let us not deceive ourselves; this war can never be won at the ballot box nor in these halls, until it has been won in our minds and hearts, until we have broken those invisible mental and emotional shackles that prevent us from overleaping the bounds of self, and embarking upon the great ad-

venture of those who are willing to lose their lives to find them, those triumphant ones who 'have forgotten themselves into immortality.' "

As he finished speaking, unconsciously, from long habit, Brandon looked up to the gallery where Mathilde always sat. In that instant the reality his brain had refused to grasp, hurled itself in his face like some brute force, and he sank into his seat as though he had been stabbed, the thunder of applause that broke from the galleries sounding in his ears like the hideous mockery of all that was most sacred in his heart.

The Vice President, pounding vigorously with his gavel, declared the galleries would be cleared unless order were restored immediately.

In the silence that followed this threat, Braxton rose and was recognized.

Belknap in his seat relaxed his tension. Braxton had been a great general, had snatched victory from defeat before. Perhaps he might yet save the day. "By Jove," he said to himself, "if he pulls this off, turns the tide now, he can have anything he wants."

In a voice that fitted the solemnity of his words, Braxton announced that he had been appalled to learn only a few minutes before of the extremely critical condition of the wife of the senior senator from Ohio, and out of the most profound sympathy for the distinguished senator, whom all his colleagues wished to relieve from the strain, to which he so heroically was subjecting himself, he moved that the bill and the substitute offered therefore, be referred to the Committee on Interstate Commerce, with instructions to report on the first day of the following week.

As Braxton ended, a wave of disgust and anger swept over the assembly. Even his own men realized

that he had over-reached himself and made a fatal error.

A death-like stillness, in strange contrast to the applause Brandon's speech had called out, greeted the conclusion of Braxton's remarks. Every eye was fixed on Brandon. Everybody was waiting breathlessly to see what he would do. Would he collapse under this new strain? Or would he rise and throttle the man who had not hesitated to take advantage of his wife's condition to try and defeat his bill?

Brandon sat for a half minute struggling to get possession of his faculties, to switch on his last reserves of will. He had fought so far, as Mathilde would have wished. All should not be lost now because of this blind, speechless fury against Braxton. Braxton, the man she despised, who had sought to turn her sacrifice to his own ends, should not snatch the victory from her hands!

He rose slowly, his face the color of chalk, the blue veins standing out on his forehead. All the vitality his will had been able to summon for his speech had ebbed away, leaving him lifeless and bloodless, the mere ghost of the man whose eloquence had just roused such enthusiasm.

The words he spoke at first had a dead sound.

"Mr. President," he began, "I had intended, and I had very much preferred, that no mention be made at this time of a matter of which it is apparent I am at present incapable of speaking, but the suggestion of the senior senator from Pennsylvania renders one word from me imperative.

"Mr. President," his voice slowly gathered strength, "all over the world to-day 'soldiers of the common good' are enlisted in a titanic struggle which involves

the lives, the happiness, and the economic freedom of generations yet unborn—a struggle as potent for good or evil as any contest of arms. The battle-ground for the particular phase of this struggle in which we are engaged, and for which we are responsible to the American people, is this senate chamber. I shall not willingly leave my post until this contest is settled, until I have performed as best I may this public duty. Mr. President, if it is the senate's pleasure to consult my wishes in this matter, this house will defeat the motion to recommit and will continue the consideration of this bill until it is passed or defeated."

Instantly the junior senator from New Jersey was on his feet. Belknap fixed his eyes on him, as though he would hypnotize him into saying the right word. It was his chance at one stroke to take Braxton's place as leader. If he could save the situation now, he was made for all time. Braxton was dead! Long live Buffington!

The young senator drew himself to his full height, and turned to face the senate, his back to Braxton. His whole attitude was that of a man who suddenly shakes off his shackles and asserts his freedom, hurling defiance at his former masters.

"Mr. President,"—his voice rang out like a liberty bell,—"I may be pardoned perhaps if I express the feeling which is strong upon me in this hour, that the hand of destiny which so often has halted men in some great crisis of their lives, is present here to-day pointing out to those of us who have stood on the brink of a precipice, the high road back to honor.

"If the opposition, in order to defeat this measure, must resort to such tactics as those suggested by the

senior senator from Pennsylvania, I wish to enroll myself with its supporters."

Braxton sprang to his feet, livid with rage protesting against the insinuations of the junior senator from New Jersey. The Vice President, ignoring Braxton, announced: "The question is shall the bill and the substitute be re-referred to the Committee of Interstate Commerce, with instructions to report the first day of the coming week. Those in favor will say 'aye,' those opposed 'no.'" A storm of "no's" instantly broke out, clearing the atmosphere of all doubt as to the temper of the senate. "The motion is lost."

"The question now is upon the motion to strike out and insert. Those in favor say aye, those opposed, no. The motion is lost.

"Shall the bill be engrossed and read a third time? There being no objection, the secretary will read the bill."

At the conclusion of the reading of the bill, the Vice President put the question in the midst of a breathless silence: "Shall the bill pass?" Senator Whitman, tense in every muscle, demanded the yeas and nays. This demand having been seconded by one-fifth of the senators present, the Vice President ordered the secretary to call the roll.

Bells began ringing in the cloak-rooms, summoning missing members, an unnecessary precaution it appeared, for every senator not absent from the Capitol was in his seat. The spaces by the doors and against the wall were filled with congressmen, who had hurried over from the House to witness the dramatic spectacle, and the vote was taken amid such excitement as had

not been experienced in the Senate within the life-time of anyone present.

"Mr. Alton, Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Baker, Mr. Beatson"—the yeas and nays kept an even pace as the Secretary read the names. An electric thrill shot through the assembly as he called Brandon's name.

Brandon, stern and pale in his seat by the door, voted aye, looked up at the clock and walked out of the chamber. There was just a half-hour before his train started.

CHAPTER XLI

THE PROMISE OF THE DAWN

AT the station there was a group of senators to see Brandon off, and to tell him, if there were any comfort in it, that his bill had passed. As the train pulled out, Buffington sprang on board. He had come, he explained to Wadlin, on the chance there might be some opportunity to be of service. After a few moments he went forward to his seat, and Wadlin joined Brandon in the drawing-room.

An hour later he came to say Brandon had asked to see Buffington. No words fitted a meeting like that, and after the greetings, the younger man made no effort to break a silence that went deeper than any speech.

As they sat together for the first time in months, the feeling of estrangement that had grown up between them disappeared and made way for the old feeling of intimacy, of comradeship in arms and in ideals, that had formerly marked their intercourse.

From the beginning Buffington had thrilled to the things Brandon stood for. Was it possible, he asked himself, that he actually had been on the point of turning his back on Brandon, and what they both believed in, that he had been willing to pay the price of such a piece of perfidy for help in putting through the children's bill?

It came over him with tremendous force that even

more important than straightening out crooked conditions on the outside might be the straightening out of the crookedness inside oneself, those crooked mental and emotional processes that give false twists to one's motives and methods, and result in distorted external conditions.

If he individually, for example, came into possession of this "higher consciousness," this divine rightness, that Mrs. Brandon used to speak of so appealingly, that rightness within his own soul inevitably would find a way to help right the wrong conditions on the outside. Instead of being dependent on Braxton and his crowd to pass the children's bill it was quite within reason to believe that this infinite principle of rightness could be relied on to find ways and means of working out its will in its own way through its own instruments. At least this supposition opened up to Buffington's mind a new and interesting field for intellectual browsing and metaphysical speculation.

Meanwhile Brandon was thinking: "So Mathilde's faith in Buffington was justified, after all." He would have liked to thank him for that speech, but he could not trust himself yet, and he knew he could trust Buffington to understand his silence.

The road wound around some foot-hills, and finally out into the heart of a wood where a late spring still showed itself in the tender green of the dogwood overhanging the stream and in the ferns among the rocks. The joy of the whole earth was in the air. Buffington, looking out of the window, spoke mechanically of its beauty.

"Yes," Brandon replied, rousing himself, as though the words had touched some chord of memory. "We passed over this road last fall, when these woods

were shot with flame, the dying splendor of autumn. 'The forest has decked itself to die,' she said, 'like some old Viking who fires his ship and goes out in a blaze of glory.' The sun was setting," Brandon went on, "a mass of flaming clouds on the horizon. Her spirit caught its fire. 'See how the sun dies!' she cried, 'All nature makes itself fair to welcome death, like a bride adorned for her bridal. It cannot be death is so drear.' " He spoke calmly, as if the memory of her voice held some balm for his soul, as if to speak of her at last gave him relief.

"I shall always remember her," Buffington said, "as I saw her the night of the Italian Ambassador's opera party,—'Clothed with light as with a garment',—that was the impression I had of everything about her." He went on to say how she had almost swept away his determination to vote against the bill by the sheer lifting power of her spirit, as she had pled with him, not for the bill but for himself.

Getting up, Buffington held out his hand to Brandon. "I wish I had words to express the reverence I feel for the woman who tried in her life to persuade me to my highest, and who from the valley of the shadow has saved me from my lowest."

Brandon gripped his hand silently, and as he bade him good-night, the younger man had a feeling of the unconscious irony of the words; as if any night or any day could ever again be good to him!

At Harrisburg there was a telegram from Charleston, Mathilde still lived. With life there was always hope. Wadlin brought in a pile of evening papers full of the dramatic scenes that attended the passage of Brandon's bill. The country was ringing with his praises; such a

speech and such a victory, many of the papers claimed, put him in line for the presidency.

Brandon turned wearily from the flaring headlines. They were all mistaken; no one understood. It was not his speech. She it was who had spoken through him; she had saved the day.

He took from a leather pocket in his suit-case, a small packet of letters and notes which Mathilde had written him out of the heart of different experiences. No two had anything in common, except that each was a perfect expression of some phase of that vari-colored, many-sided, elusive self of hers; some will-o'-the-wisp mood or vagrant fancy, caught on the wing, and brought to earth to be shared with him.

How she had grown since those early days! She had never stopped growing, unfolding wealth on wealth of hid treasures. For a life like that to be wiped out of a world that reeked with its failures, its deformities! The horror of it beat upon him, his soul rose in revolt, the immemorial revolt of the sons of men who do not yet know that they are the Sons of God.

The engine rumbled and roared, belching out flames into the night, as it dashed on its way through tunnels and around sharp curves, bearing him on to her. . . . And his soul, impelled by some blind force, seemed likewise to be rushing forward he knew not whither, to plunge into a night of infinite darkness and despair. He had an impulse to hurl himself out of the window. The torture of this suspense, the agony of such a homecoming, seemed more than his reason could endure.

Half dead with weariness, he fell asleep and dreamed that the dream they had dreamed together had come

true, and she was waiting at home with the child for him. In the gray dawn of the morning, his journey ended, he came to the house where the angel of life and the angel of death still disputed the victory. . . .

The tempest that had been raging over the lake broke in fresh fury, while in Mathilde's room two voices were heard, mingling for an instant with the voice of the storm, the low moan of a woman and the cry of a child.

Outside Mathilde's door Walleck was waiting for Brandon. . . . The labor had been long and exhausting; convulsions had set in, with the heart too weak to risk an anesthetic; the child, a boy, had been safely taken by the Cæsarean incision. During the birth, Mathilde's heart had stopped beating; twice they had believed her dead, but Charleston and Butler and Marden, who arrived before daybreak, had made a last desperate stand to restore life, and were still battling. They had finally succeeded in animating her heart; transfusions of saline solution, artificial respiration, and oxygen were being given; there was a faint intermittent response, a chance still for hope.

Walleck went back to join the surgeons, and Brandon stood by and watched the battle, watched for an hour, until he knew Life had won! Presently he heard Marden speaking to him, Marden the miracle worker, speaking like an ordinary man! And he found himself shaking hands with Charleston, as though he too, were merely human! Then they all went out for a little, and left him alone with Mathilde, while she slept. Seized by a sudden impulse, he crossed to where the child was sleeping, lifted him in his arms and stole back to the mother's room. "And while little Dave

sleeps, we will sit together, 'hour on hour, quietly, quietly, as married people use,' " so she had once said, touching up the picture with a little phrase from Browning.

How vividly he recalled her words! Very quiet it was in that darkened room, where the mother and the child slept and the father kept his vigil. Through an open window came the twitter of birds from trees where the robins were nesting with their young. All nature was awake. Everywhere the air was pulsing with the breath of new glad life, spring with its resurrection joy, and the light of a day that has conquered the night.

The child stirred in his arms and the strong man felt for the first time the despair of his utter helplessness. What could he do for the child now? What could he ever do alone without her? The fear that had clutched at his heart and held him by the throat those terrifying hours, had not yet loosed its grip on his imagination. "Good God, what if she should not wake to hear this cry of his own heart, this cry of her child for her!"

He rose and paced heavily up and down the room, as much to quiet his own tumult as to soothe the child. Suddenly he paused, pierced by a look of yearning on her face. Was there something she was asking him, some sweet hid desire that he could satisfy?

"No one ever did understand my deepest down self but you." How often she had said that, when he had caught some passing fancy, or satisfied some fugitive whim, or when his soul had answered her own soul's unspoken word!

He hesitated a moment, then stooping gently, laid the

child for an instant against her breast. The change of position soothed the child. When he lifted it, something like a smile was on the baby face, and it seemed to him as if she too were smiling in her sleep!

THE END